

# SPECIAL OPS

JOURNAL OF THE ELITE FORCES  
& SWAT UNITS  
VOL.15



Heat Up in Macedonia  
Belgian ESI

U.S. Army's 160th SOAR(A) Night Stalkers

Greater Manchester Police Tactical Firearms Unit

Royal Gurkha Rifles



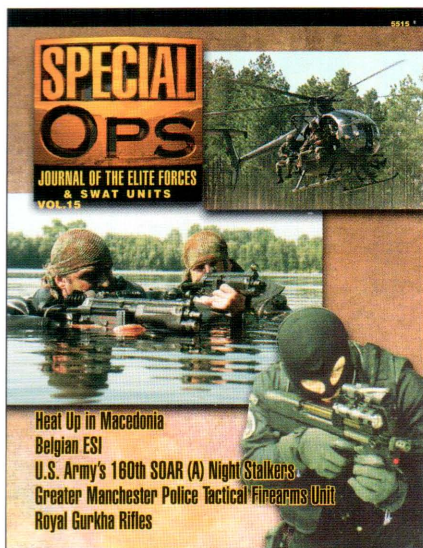


# **SPECIAL OPS**

**JOURNAL OF THE ELITE FORCES  
& SWAT UNITS  
VOL.15**

**CONCORD**  
PUBLICATIONS COMPANY





Heat Up in Macedonia  
Belgian ESI  
U.S. Army's 160th SOAR (A) Night Stalkers  
Greater Manchester Police Tactical Firearms Unit  
Royal Gurkha Rifles

Editor: Samuel M. Katz  
Copyright © 2001  
by CONCORD PUBLICATIONS CO.  
603-609 Castle Peak Road  
Kong Nam Industrial Building  
10/F, B1, Tsuen Wan  
New Territories, Hong Kong  
[www.concord-publications.com](http://www.concord-publications.com)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concord Publications Co.

We welcome authors who can help expand our range of books. If you would like to submit material, please feel free to contact us.

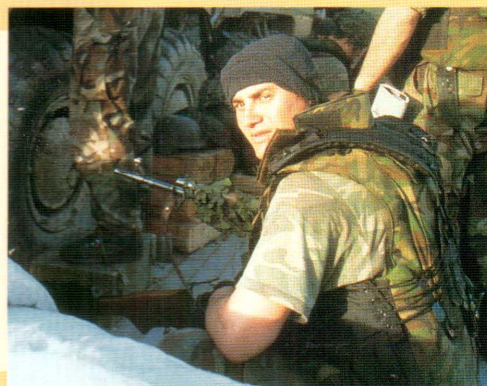
We are always on the look-out for new, unpublished photos for this series. If you have photos or slides or information you feel may be useful to future volumes, please send them to us for possible future publication. Full photo credits will be given upon publication.

ISBN 962-361-694-5  
printed in Hong Kong

P 3

## Heat Up in Macedonia

Yves Debay



P 13

## The ESI

The Belgian Elite

Samuel M. Katz

P 22

*"Death in the Darkness with the Night Stalkers!"*

## The U.S. Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne)

Samuel M. Katz



P 38

PROTECTING THE PROTECTORS  
THE GREATER MANCHESTER POLICE

## TACTICAL FIREARMS UNIT

Samuel M. Katz

P 46

## The Royal Gurkha Rifles Britain's Foreign Elite

Carl Schulze





# Heat Up in Macedonia

Yves Debay



*Soldiers belonging to the Macedonian Special Forces observe the hills to assess the effect of the fire from the 14.5mm KPV machine gun mounted on a BTR-80. During the weeklong clashes between the Albanians and the Macedonians, this BTR-80 remained in its position at the checkpoint north of Tetovo. The Macedonian flag atop the vehicle made a perfect target, but it was not subjected to any rebel fire. (Yves Debay)*

Policemen running, dodging fire from an unseen enemy; armored personnel carriers taking up positions, bringing their machine guns to bear; the surrounding hills exploding under a barrage of artillery fire; helicopters making seemingly endless strafing runs. Such was the scene in March of 2001 when the NLA (National Liberation Army) or UCK (M) (for Macedonia) infiltrated Macedonia near Tetovo.

Leaving behind his beer at a Macedonian bar, a correspondent from the BBC dressed in a blue flak jacket exits his hotel and begins to speak in front of the hills rising behind the city of Tetovo. He plans on saying that grenades are exploding on the heights that dominate the city. The camera's telephoto lens will provide a close-up shot of the action, thereby convincing the world that the city of Tetovo is ablaze in fire and awash in blood. Thus the media broadcast will transform a series of skirmishes into a latter-day Battle of Stalingrad that threatens to engulf the Balkans in war.

While it may be true that the FYROM (Former Republic of Macedonia) has the potential of being a Balkan powder keg, the spark that was intended to light it apparently has not yet sprung from the lighter. The military operation launched by the NLA had all the effectiveness of a wet firecracker. Although ethnic solidarity gave the Albanians of Tetovo every reason to be of one heart with the insurgents in the mountains, they seemed to be satisfied with merely observing the events. The geographic location of the city made it the best place to watch the fighting.

Whether Albanian or Slav, the Macedonians do not seem to be the greatest warriors. They are a far cry from the warlike crowd that shook things up in Zagreb or Belgrade in 1991. With the exception of the BBC or CNN, who believed that Macedonia would be a new Vukovar, military specialists feel that the military operations in March were particularly uncoordinated in a deliberate effort to avoid an impolitic escalation of violence.

The first thing that intrigued military specialists was the moderate reaction of the Macedonian armed forces in the face of a threat that has existed since the republic became independent. From the beginning of the crisis back in February, the Macedonians adopted a low profile, notably not deploying a concentration of troops in the Albanian-speaking zone in order to avoid any provocation from a potentially hostile population.

The lukewarm reaction by the ARM (Army of the Republic of Macedonia) may have been caused by the arrival of the Chief of Staff of AFSOUTH, Italian General Fabio Mini, and several British counselors who were charged with creating a cabinet of coordination between the FYROM and NATO. NATO would have probably advised the Macedonians not to swat a fly with a hammer.

Also, the military potential of the FYROM is limited. The military leaders did not fall into the trap of deploying important forces over terrain that was dominated by mountains controlled by enemy forces near a city that was ethnically hostile where firepower would have limited effectiveness. In the event of a popular uprising, the ARM would have seen its armored vehicles trapped in narrow streets and, with the exception of the barracks, it would have been unable to control of the city. Further, the NLA guerrillas would have been able to cut the road to the capital city of Skopje and breach the rear of the ARM forces. If the situation escalated, the government forces could have been surrounded inside a geographic pocket at Tetovo.

The decision not to answer the provocative action of the Albanians with a torrent of fire prevented the population from openly joining the NLA camp because there was practically no collateral damage to the houses in the city. With the exception of two notorious members of organized crime gangs (who were shot down at the northern checkpoint as they tried to transport grenades in their car) and five civilians killed by stray bullets, the loss of human life in Tetovo was very low.





*Monday, March 26. The "Wolves", the Macedonian Army's Special Forces, with their faces masked to insure their anonymity, take up a position at the old Turkish fort that dominates the town of Tetovo. (Yves Debay)*

If the Macedonian reaction seems to have been relatively measured, one also has to wonder why the NLA consisted of UCK guerrillas from Kosovo and why a number of local recruits did not try to rally the population. At the beginning of the crisis, and even during the various phases of fighting, the people of the NLA would have had no problem occupying Tetovo, with the exception of the barracks. But this was not done. Was it to mask weakness or simply to allow a dialogue to begin by not giving the government an excuse to intervene in force?

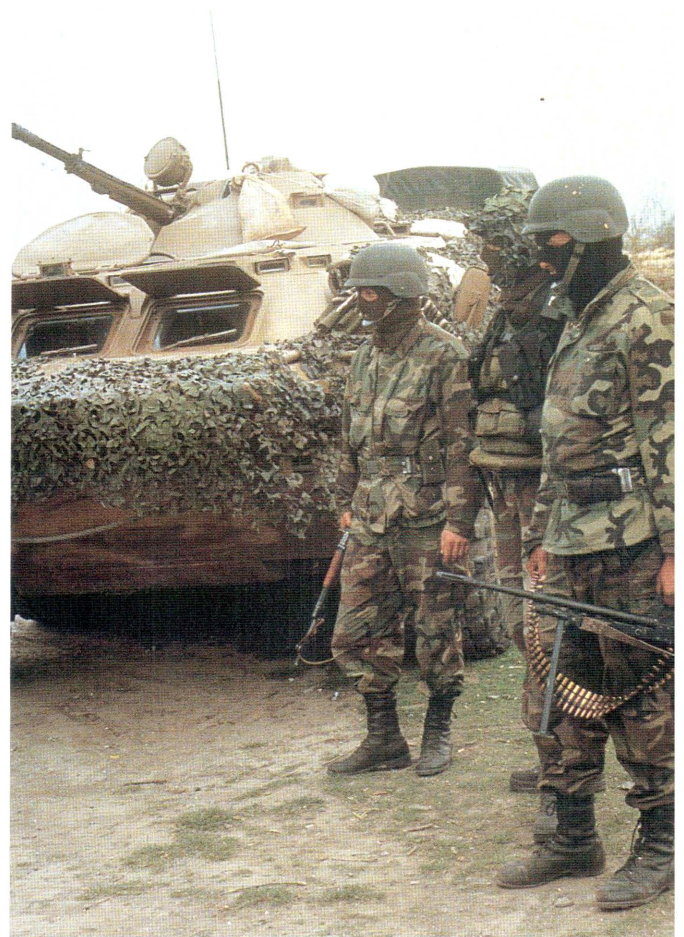
But to return to the "Battle of Tetovo." On March 14, the Macedonian Ministry of Interior announced that some 200 "terrorists" had taken up a position on the Sir Planina foothills that dominated Tetovo. It was there that the first skirmish took place when police and border guards got the news. The NLA captured a Hermelin armored personnel carrier and killed several soldiers.

At the beginning of the crisis, with the UCK staying up in the hills, the Macedonians began a very progressive implementation of their force. Some of their regular troops were quartered in the large barracks situated east of the city. They shared these barracks with the Bundeswehr, thus creating a logistics depot for the Multinational Brigade South [MNB (S)] in Kosovo. Contrary to what the media said, there was no panic among the German units. The German portion of the barracks was evacuated very calmly by methodically taking down installations. They figured that since there were German servicemen in the barracks, the NLA would not fire on this choice target – the only one in Tetovo where the Albanian rebels did not risk hitting members of their own ethnic population. Along with this tacit wink given to the Macedonians, the Germans are going to strengthen the dismantling teams by sending a platoon of Leopard 2A4s and Marders.

During the duration of the fighting, there were soldiers of the Bundeswehr present in Tetovo. However, this did not prevent the Army of the Republic of Macedonia from installing a firebase that operated 122mm D-30 howitzers in that area. A battery of 120mm mortars belonging to the police force was set up near the bus station. There were also two 81mm mortar batteries placed in the north and south exits of the city.

The city of Tetovo was never hermetically isolated and, with the exception of a curfew that went into effect at 19 hours (7:00 p.m.), the traffic was completely normal. This was a strange phenomenon for a town supposedly engulfed in combat, which is the view of the city that the media took. On March 21, two platoons of T-55s arrived from Kumanovo. Exactly six tanks took up their positions east of the city. Though they did not move for several days, the world's press made sure to mention the important existence of these armored reinforcements.

The checkpoint in the northern part of the city, one of two rare control points at the entrances into Tetovo, would be used by the media



*The "Wolves" of the Army of the Republic of Macedonia (AR) are supported in their efforts to subdue the Albanian rebels by a BTR-80 that is apparently attached to the unit. The helmet worn by 1 troops is the American "Fritz" style. Their camouflaged battle dress uniform is also American. (Yves Debay)*

to illustrate the "Battle of Tetovo" for the entire world. Consisting of the Henschel TM-170 armored cars (locally referred to as "Hermelin") BTR-80 and some sandbags, this checkpoint was filmed from every angle by all the cameras of the world's press. But throughout the crisis, the armored cars never moved an inch.

A large Macedonian flag was raised on the roof of the BTR-80. The flag's gold sunburst on a red background should have made an excellent aiming point for a guerilla hoping to destroy the vehicle. None of the vehicles was hidden from view; they were all easily visible from the rebel positions. The checkpoint was as visible as a fly in a bowl of milk. In a matter of seconds a good RPG-7 or AT-3 Sagger specialist could have



*The BTR-80 wheeled vehicle gives the Macedonian troops definite advantage over the Albanian insurgents. The vehicle seen here is just one of dozens BTR-80s in Macedonia's arsenal of weapons. (Yves Debay)*





The "Wolves" of the ARM's Special Forces and the "Tigers" of the police force led the main assault missions. The machine gun carried by this battle-ready soldier is a PKM of Russian origin, which doubtless arrived in Macedonia from Bulgaria. (Yves Debay)

reduced these armored cars to piles of smoking scrap metal. In view of every journalist, who were kept aside behind a barrier, policemen and Special Forces units holding the north checkpoint opened fire on the hills, but the rebels did not return fire!

As night approached, these soldiers at the checkpoint, who did not have night vision equipment, adjusted their firing and kept shooting at the hillsides at the houses that snipers might use as a shelter. This daily spectacle naturally persuaded the world's press that a new invasion attempt by the UCK was being repelled.

Having strengthened several positions, but without a real demonstration of force, the ARM resumed the initiative on March 25. Well-aimed salvos descended on the crest of the hill, framing the old Turkish fort dominating the city. At about 8 o'clock in the morning, the special police forces, the "Tigers" (*silina specijalna policija "Tigri"*), advanced up the road toward the village of Gajne southwest of Tetovo. Mounted on seven Hermelin armored cars, these troops were supported by the equivalent of a company of regular army troops and an 81mm mortar platoon.

The operation was a simple one. It was merely a question of flanking the enemy position near the old Turkish fort from which the NLA dominating the city and establishing a firebase which would take out this position. Having been delayed by a non-mined obstacle, the policemen and infantry arrive at the village of Gajne three-fourths of the way up the hill. There they come under fire, just enough to make them keep their heads down. Nevertheless, one Hermelin is hit by an RPG-7, which increases the total of this type of vehicle to be destroyed to two. The Macedonian forces waver a bit. One soldier is wounded, but soon the troops press forward again, covered by effective return fire. Farther to the



A majority of the light weapons used by the ARM are of Yugoslav origin. Note the 81mm mortar in the foreground of this photograph. (Yves Debay)

north on the right flank, a heliborne operation gives the village of Germa to the ARM, but the net is not yet closed around the UCK forces. In Seltje, the temporary capital of the Albanian rebels, a journalist finds only an old woman and a donkey. The "Wolves" of the Macedonian Special Forces (*Specijalni edinci na Armijata "Volci"*) have raised the red and gold flag of the FYROM over the old Turkish fort.

The following day the site is presented to the press. The hill has obviously suffered from the bombardment of the ARM, but no trace remains of the UCK. The officials try to present dubious bloodstains and an old uniform jacket as proof that the position was cleared out by force. But there are no shell casings to be found in the emplacement. There are no remains of ammunition crates and no bloody bandages. Nothing is found that would characterize a battlefield. The ARM seems to have expended a lot of ammunition firing at a position that had been occupied for only a few hours and from which practically no shots were fired on the city.

Nevertheless, the Turkish fort and the neighboring towns are an eagle's nest. Underground passages dating back to the Ottoman period connect them with the city. From this position, the NLA would have had no problem blocking military movement in the city. It should have been child's play for them to drop mortar rounds on the barracks or for snipers to fire on the checkpoint. Why was this not done?

At the same time the "Battle of Tetovo" was being fought, other UCK (M) incursions led to fighting in the Gracani region, a zone north of Skopje that is ethnically Slavic. Even though they were limited, these light skirmishes had an important psychological impact since artillery fire could be heard in the nation's capital. The other particularly significant aspect of these conflicts is that they were doubtless the result of the





Along with the ARM's Special Forces unit, the elite police assault force was involved in the fight for the old Turkish fort. Note the special camouflage and the blue helmet and flak jacket. Their weapon of choice is the classic Yugoslav M-76 automatic rifle, the sniper version of the Yugoslav army's 7.92mm weapon. (Yves Debay)

UCK's desire to gain close proximity to the route known as "Hawk", the vital artery necessary for supplying the KFOR troops in Kosovo. A logistic convoy could even put itself under cover near Blace's border crossing. It is difficult to get an idea of the intensity of these skirmishes. Unlike Tetovo, particularly tough policemen quickly sealed off this region. Here, too, the NLA seems to have evaporated while facing an attack of a battalion of infantry strengthened by tanks and BTR-80s.

During the struggle, Macedonian mortar rounds fell in Kosovar territory, killing an English photographer and injuring 20 persons. This provoked a sharp reaction from the Albanian media in Pristina and Tirana. Other infiltration seems to have also taken place in the Kumanovo area, which did not result in any important fighting.

One month after the beginning of the crisis, everything in Skopje is under the control of the government. It is too early to draw definitive conclusions about these first confrontations in Macedonia, but these are the impressions of the author. A highly rated military force, the NLA attempted a reconnaissance in force to test the reaction of the Macedonian government and international community. The Albanian activist party received a bitter defeat in the elections held in Kosovo in November 2000, and it is not impossible that the spring operations in Macedonia were also aimed at reactivating the revolutionary dynamics of the cause of a "Greater Albania". An intense recruitment drive is currently taking place in Kosovo among the young people. Even in Macedonia, the younger people are sensitive to the sirens call of the UCK.

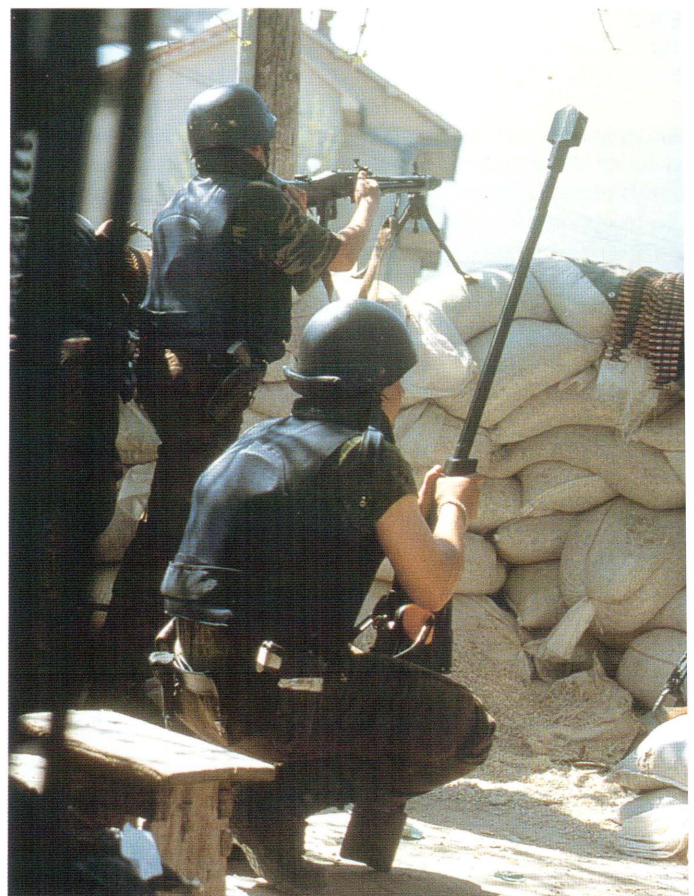
Officially, the purpose of the NLA was to lead an armed action to force the Skopje government to give more political rights to its Albanian minority (35 to 40 % of the population). The message was certainly understood loud and clear, and one can only expect a favorable governmental reaction. This is especially true if they are pressured by a Europe that is worried about the prospect of another war in the Balkans. The Macedonian government already has three Albanian Ministers in its



A soldier from the Special Forces takes up a position behind 12.7mm Zastava "Black Arrow" sniper rifle of Serbian origin. It seems that a close tie exists between the ARM and the Serbian armed forces, which the Macedonian soldiers admired for their resistance during the NATO air strikes in 1999. (Yves Debay)

ranks. Even though they refuse to negotiate with or cave in to the military pressure of the "terrorists", perhaps the Macedonians ought to take account a certain number of the demands of their Albanian minority; reward it for not having followed the rebels en masse.

From a political point of view, the UCK seems to have lost a lot. The unanimity of the international community around the Macedonians and their use of the official vocabulary describing the Albanian guerrillas (who were praised just two years ago) as rebels and terrorists is significant. The license granted to the Serbian armed forces to redepict in the valley of Pancevo is also symbolic of the change of attitude on the part of the Western powers that grow increasingly tired of the excesses.



Here a policeman uses the 12.7mm Zastava "Black Arrow" sniper rifle. The weapon's unique appearance is well displayed here. Note the M-53, the Yugoslav version of the famous German MG-42, in action in the background. (Yves Debay)





*This TM-170 "Hermelin" is part of a convoy of police BRDM-2s and border guard Hermelins traveling through Tetovo. Twelve days after the skirmish life was completely normal in the town. The camouflage on the TM-170 is unusual and was only used by the border guards. One brigade of border guards is included in the Macedonian Army. (Yves Debay)*

the UCK in Kosovo. They understand that one totalitarian government has been chased away by another that, with the support of NATO, has formed the basis for a future mafia state where ethnic purification is carried out against non-Albanians.

Certain observers do not hesitate to describe the decay of the situation in Macedonia as a destabilization campaign carried out by the Albanian mafia with the goal of creating a zone of insecurity in the ethnic Albanian zone in northern Macedonia. This would allow for a better connection to Bulgaria, the terminus of the drug traffic from Central Asia and a passage for the white slave trade from Moldavia in Albania. Kosovo had performed this role, but the tough attitude of the KFOR forces toward the UCK seems to have strongly hampered the traffickers.

Macedonia has emerged strengthened by the crisis. Western money is going to continue to feed their coffers, especially if it helps to stabilize the country, which is a powder keg that has a border that touches the European community (at Greece).

In its baptism of fire, the Macedonian army gained experience at the cost of six deaths and two destroyed armored cars. The NLA losses appear to have been higher, perhaps twenty deaths. Even though the fighting was of low intensity (contrary to what was described by the broadcast media), the test of fire only serves to weld a small army isolated in a Balkan region where force is respected. The crisis was made more



*Policemen at the northern checkpoint direct their fire to the hills above Tetovo. Two PKM machine guns are seen in action. The journalists are quick to interpret these skirmishes as high intensity firefights. (Yves Debay)*



*Shelling the hillside. In the wake of the incursions of the Albanian NLA, the Macedonian Army pounded the hills that surround Tetovo. A lot of ammunition was fired on vacant positions. (Yves Debay)*

interesting by the military materiel offered by nearby countries or purchased with European money. For example, in ten days the number of helicopters doubled from the four original Mi-17s, one of which was accidentally lost at the beginning of the fighting, to eight thanks to the addition of two armed Mi-8s and two Mi-24s offered by Ukraine and two surplus Bell UH-1Hs acquired from the Greek Army.

Even though the Albanian incursion was alarming, it was not unexpected, at least judging from the moderate reactions of NATO and the Macedonian government. Future peace depends on the level of concessions the Slavic Macedonians offer to the Albanian minority and the ability of the Albanian minority to refuse the influence of the extremists of the UCK. [Note: As of May 2001, the government has rejected making any change in the Macedonian constitution to reflect an increase in rights for the Albanian minority.]

No doubt there will be further NLA offensives. [Note: At the time of this writing, the Macedonian government has retaliated against the Albanian rebels for ambushing several soldiers.] If the rebels manage to win over the Albanian population, the FYROM will be transformed into a real Balkan nightmare that could have implications for Turkey and other nearby nations.



*Here is another view of the policemen at the checkpoint. Unlike the Albanians (which make up 80% of the population of this region), who were contented to follow the conflict as spectators, the Macedonian Slavs (the remaining 20%) provided the soldiers with alcohol and even offered to carry ammunition. It seems that Slavic paramilitary units are being trained and, if new fighting erupts, they may enter the action just as the Serb militia did in the war in Bosnia. (Yves Debay)*





A policeman of the elite force observes the summits of Sir Planina from a position near the old Turkish fort that was conquered the day before. (Yves Debay)



A T-55 of the ARM returns to the barracks at Tetovo. Six of these tanks were positioned at the crossroads east of the city, well protected so as to avoid a flanking movement by the rebels. The ARM probably has to keep a low profile. Only one platoon supported the advance of the forces on March 25, and it is unknown if this T-55 fired a shot. (Yves Debay)



"Wolves" of the ARM's Special Forces are seen at the northern checkpoint. It is very difficult to approach these soldiers to take a photograph. Often the nervous soldiers aimed at the author and cocked their weapons. (Yves Debay)



Men of the elite police force unit stand in front of two TM-170 "Hermelin" vehicles atop the hill where the old Turkish fort is located following its conquest. (Yves Debay)



Another view of a TM-170 "Hermelin". Two vehicles of this type were lost during the combat phase of the advance on the fort, which is visible in the background. (Yves Debay)





A Belgian para-commando group from the 3rd Lancers poses with their new Pandur wheeled vehicle. (Yves Debay)



A platoon of Belgian para-commandos mounted on Pandurs came down from Leposavic in Kosovo to protect Belgian logistics to Kumanovo (Macedonia) where Albanian infiltration seems to have taken place. (Yves Debay)



Another photograph of the elite Belgian troops. Their deployment to Macedonia was the first deployment of the Pandur vehicles since they were issued to the Belgian Army in August 2000. (Yves Debay)

### Army of the Republic of Macedonia (ARM)

The structure of the Macedonian Army following the independence of the country in 1992 is based on the model of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA). Today, naturally, its formation is based on the NATO model since the FYROM is a member of the Partnership for Peace. Nowadays the ARM consists of a corps with three brigades, one of which is held in reserve, and a second corps that can be mobilized. Added to this are a brigade of border guards, a light aviation battalion, a Special Forces battalion, and the Guard of Honor.

Every brigade consists of two battalions of infantry and a battalion of artillery. The first employs BTR-80s and the second uses Dodge or Iveco trucks. The motorized battalion of infantry on BTR-80s consists of three rifle companies and a battery of 120mm mortars. A squadron of T-55 tanks is attached to the motorized battalion that uses trucks. The battalion of artillery is composed of three batteries of six guns, generally 105mm US M-101s or 122mm D-30s. The artillery performed relatively well during the springtime confrontations in spite of their outdated target acquisition instruments. Their shots were precise and seem to have caused losses in the UCK ranks.

The "Tigers" of the police special forces and the Army "Wolves" led most of the operations. Although well trained, these men behave a little like the movie character Rambo. In Tetovo, the policemen were extremely nervous, though they were hardly subjected to any enemy fire

at all. One can only imagine their reactions in the face of real opposition.

### Armament

BTR-60: about 20 ex-Bulgarian (Police and Army)  
 BTR-70: 60 ex-Volksarmee  
 BTR-80: 12 BTRs purchased from Kazakhstan  
 T-55: 150 coming from Bulgaria; 114 T-55As and 36 T-55 AB-2s.  
 Other figures put the number at 94.  
 M-113: 10 (formerly Italian)  
 Leonidas: 10 (formerly Greek)  
 TP-170 "Hermelin": around 30

Anti-tank weapons: MILAN (France) and AT-3 (ex-Yugoslav)

Artillery: 150 pieces coming from Bulgaria (10 152mm D-20s; 72 76mm ZiS-3s; 36 D-30s or 2S-1 Gvodzika); 18 105mm M-101s from the USA

The light armament is of national construction and is completely Yugoslavian in origin, including some 12.7mm "Black Arrow" precision rifles from Serbia. France has delivered OLIFANT infantry radar.

This variety of materiel can only damage the efficiency of the ARM. The recent crisis and continued fighting will no doubt serve to bring some homogeneity to the purchase of armaments.



### KFOR in the CRISIS

In private and off the record, officers in KFOR are beginning to wonder exactly what NATO's place is in this "can of worms" in Macedonia. It does not take a trained strategist to see that in the totally enclosed region of Kosovo, all of KFOR's supplies arrive on the Salonika-Skopje-Pristina route, which is nicknamed "Hawk", with a smaller road called "Lion" that follows the ridge of Sir Planina, the route that the Albanian rebels came down. The destruction of the two bridges over the gorges at Blace, or merely the harassment of convoys, would have extremely grave consequences. The airport runway at Pristina is grossly inefficient to use in supplying KFOR, which (with the exception of Camp Bondsteel) does not seem to arrange for having on hand more than ten days' worth of ammunition, fuel and food.

If NATO openly backs the government of Skopje, as it seems it will, we will not have to wait long for the population of Kosovo (which is 85% Albanian) to have a change of attitude. If that change is a result of manipulation by agitators, hostile acts against KFOR will soon increase. Mitrovica-style rioting could break out in any part of the region. Any laxness shown by the FYROM in controlling the northern borders could also irritate the Macedonians, who could close the unique border-crossing point at Blace in reprisal.

What is the status of civilian traffic during the current crisis? "We see heavy evacuating by getting permission from the Serbs for a right of way

by way of Belgrade", confides an KFOR officer. "We are still not in there. NATO reacted to the crisis immediately by creating a committee of coordination with the government of the FYROM by AFSOUTH."

Macedonia is the main logistic platform of KFOR, and 3200 soldiers belonging to 17 nations are based there. At the beginning of the crisis, Leopard 2 tanks and Marder vehicles quickly took up a position at Tetovo's barracks to protect the withdrawal operation of the German logistics unit to a safer place. Farther east, the Belgians sent a Pandur platoon of paratroopers of the 3rd Lancers from Leposavic in Kosovo to protect their Kumanovo logistic base. This was the first operational mission for these armored cars, which were delivered last August. France decided to send a unit of CL-129 Drones, and the USA redeployed the UAV Predator in the Balkans.

Since the border of Kosovo is so important, the control of the southern border was strengthened with British and Scandinavian soldiers, who were sent to bolster the US, Turkish and German troops. But everyone knows that in the Balkans borders are like sieves. Nowadays the press and the NATO spokesperson do not speak about the 300km (186 miles) of borders between the FYROM and Albania, a zone that is quiet for the moment. It is ethnically Albanian, and the ARM has no means of controlling it. In brief, it is the perfect infiltration route for the "rebels", who threaten to strike anywhere in Macedonian territory.



*At the height of the fighting in Tetovo, the Bundeswehr methodically evacuates its installations at the barracks it shared with the ARM. (Yves Debay)*



*A platoon of Fuchs vehicles carrying paratroops insures the safety of the logistic convoy. This side view of a personnel carrier shows how the vehicle is camouflaged and the clearly visible KFOR markings. (Yves Debay)*



*Contrary to what the media reported, there was no panic associated with the orderly evacuation of the German units from the shared barracks. This photograph illustrates the discipline that prevailed. (Yves Debay)*

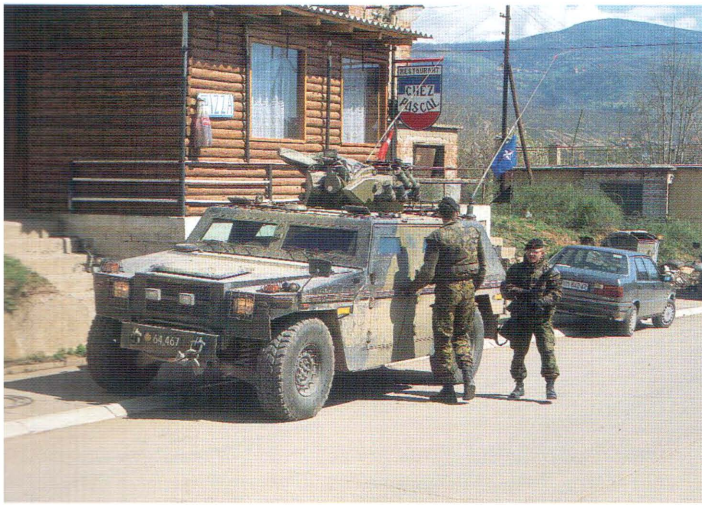


*While the fighting was taking place in Tetovo, KFOR stepped up its efforts to control traffic at the borders. This soldier belongs to a Danish reconnaissance unit. (Yves Debay)*





The Danish recce troops employed Mowag Eagles in their efforts to maintain order through the use of a mobile checkpoint. (Yves Debay)



The checkpoint established by the Danish recce troops was in an area north of Mitrovica. Here Danish troops stand next to a Mowag Eagle parked in front of a restaurant on a well-paved thoroughfare in the area. (Yves Debay)



Another vehicle that proved valuable to the Danish recce troops is the Mercedes 4x4. Note the splotchy camouflage painted on the vehicle. (Yves Debay)



Soldiers of the Danish reconnaissance unit discuss the progress of the mobile checkpoint. Note the weapons slung over the shoulders of the troops in the foreground. (Yves Debay)

During the clashes in Macedonia, all of the KFOR troops were on full alert, as indicated by the demeanor of this Luxembourg soldier at a Belgium-Luxembourg checkpoint. Note his Steyr assault rifle. (Yves Debay)





During times of crisis, such as the fighting in Macedonia, it is the safest policy to remain alert for any turn of events that may occur. Here a Belgian Leopard tank seems prepared for any emergency. (Yves Debay)



Greek M-113s patrol in Kosovo. Greece is particularly concerned about the situation in Macedonia. The country shares a common border, and the Greeks and Albanians have a dispute over the Epirus region in southern Albania. (Yves Debay)



The 2nd REP (Régiment Etranger de Parachutistes), the famous French Foreign Legion paratroop regiment, are doing their best to help prevent further clashes between the Albanians and the Macedonians. Here is a soldier of that renowned unit. (Yves Debay)



French troops make a thorough search of a suspicious vehicle. During one of their patrols, the legionnaires seized a truck carrying 80 mortar rounds and several RPG-7 rockets that were supposed to resupply the UCK guerrillas in Macedonia. (Yves Debay)



The men of the 2nd REP know that a crisis in the small republic of Macedonia could pose a concrete threat to the routes used to supply KFOR. In the MNB (N) zone, an important seizure of weapons was made while the fighting began to intensify in Macedonia. (Yves Debay)



Part of the duties of the 3rd Company of the 2nd REP is to conduct night patrols at Mitrovica. KFOR has intensified its efforts to control the shipment of supplies to the UCK and to hamper their activity. (Yves Debay)





*Perhaps more than any other counter-terrorist and hostage-rescue force in the world, the ESI makes maximum use of its K-9 force. Here, during a search for a violent perpetrator, an ESI operator in full kit prepares to unleash his partner—a Belgian Malinois. (Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)*

It was 3:00 AM—the best time, it was thought, to raid a drug den. A light mist covered the street with a shiny glow and the temperature hovered just above freezing, though street traffic was still busy. Lookouts manned each corner, and the rhythm of rap music emanated from inside a beat-up van parked in front of the targeted location. Across the street, ten officers wearing protective gear and carrying submachine guns sat anxiously inside a nondescript delivery truck awaiting the order to go. They had just come off a grueling 12-hour tubular assault exercise where they honed their skills for assaulting a hijacked aircraft, when word of the high-risk narcotics arrest reached their commander. Drug raids with weapons at the ready were rare before—now they were weekly occurrences. The operation's commanding officer ordered the tactical element into action—a plainclothes narcotics officer had just emerged from the location and had removed his cap, the signal that the targeted players were, indeed, inside. The door of the truck swung open and the officers raced across the street in a well-choreographed advance and through the main doorway; officers with assault rifles covered the nearby streets, as well as windows and rooftops for any attempts at escape or resistance.

The raid caused a landslide of activity; motorists fled, suspect lookouts raced for cover, and the sounds of shouting and baby's crying engulfed the night. On the staircase the officers moved gingerly, hoping not to encounter any ravaging dogs or booby-traps, but time was of the essence. The drug enterprise had been warned by the noise on the street, and the element of surprise lost. At the door, a shot-lock round was fired from the breacher's shotgun, though the steel door was barricaded from inside with two steel bars. Thirty seconds of work with a hydraulic entry tool and a sledgehammer cleared the entrance, and the officers hurled in four flash-bangs. Entry was made and the perpetrators had but one choice—resist and lose. The raid yielded twenty-kilos of cocaine and

hashish, 10 handguns, an AK-47, some explosive devices, a stack of fake IDs and drivers licenses, and nearly half a million dollars in currency. On the “mean streets of America,” the night's warrant would have been considered business as usual, but this wasn't America and here the phenomenon of drugs, money and guns was something new. The warrant was executed in the picturesque Belgian capital of Brussels, in a part of town that few venture to anymore. It is a new Europe where the war against organized crime and violence has been handed over to police tactical squads that were created to fight some of the world's most notorious terrorist factions. The warrant wasn't served by just any SWAT team, but rather one of the true international elite counter-terrorist squads, the Belgian Gendarmerie's ESI, trained to storm hijacked trains, and battle it out with bloodthirsty terrorists willing to martyr themselves off for “the cause.” Welcome to the dangerous world of tactical law enforcement in the New Europe—a world of organized crime, indiscriminate violence, and where the police are often placed in the cross hairs.

The tactical reality of law enforcement in Europe caught most police officials by surprise—few envisioned that the collapse of the Iron Curtain would result in iron bars being placed over businesses, homes and institutions. Yet this wasn't the first time that Europe's police commanders have been caught unprepared. The development of tactical police teams in Europe date back to September 5, 1972, when Palestinian terrorists invaded the Summer Olympics in Munich and seized the Israeli team in a flurry of automatic weapons fire. The attack rocked every European capital—Middle Eastern terrorism had become an uncontrollable phenomenon in Europe, but attacks were usually restricted to airports. The Munich attack was a well-coordinated military operation, and it left local law enforcement answerless. The attempt to terminate the terrorists at Munich's Fürstenfeldbrück Airport ended in disaster. All of the hostages





During a narcotics warrant in a working class neighborhood north of Brussels, two ESI operators peer through the sights of their Glocks on a targeted doorway. (E. Duffeler - Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)

were killed in the ambush, and several of the terrorists managed to hold police and military units at bay for nearly four hours. Europe was unprepared for a war of the shadows and it was ill equipped for what lay ahead.

Belgium's *Escadron Special D'Intervention*, or "Special Intervention Squadron," is not one of the world's most publicized counter-terrorist and hostage-rescue forces, but it is among the world's finest. It is a force ideally trained for intervention and hostage-rescue, and capable of handling just about any tactical situation and crisis imaginable. Among the world's best-trained specialists, they are also among the world's best equipped. Terrorism has not been a major factor in Belgium's post-war history mainly as a result of the ESI's reputation as a second-to-none unit.

Like virtually every other hostage-rescue unit in the world, the ESI was formed in the aftermath of the 1972 Munich Olympic Massacre, as a special operations force of the Gendarmerie, or *Rijkswacht* in Flemish, the national militarized police. Like West Germany when it created GSG-9, Belgium looked to create a revolutionary force of specialists that would be a secretive element of the equation should an attack like the one perpetrated against the Olympic village ever be committed inside of Belgium. Belgium's national counter-terrorist and hostage-rescue unit was officially formed on December 6, 1972, and was originally known as "*Le Groupe Diane*" (from the unit's symbol and the symbol of Belgian criminal justice system). The unit's first commander, Major Arsène Pint, was an Olympic athlete who competed in the 1960 summer games in Rome and he actively recruited former members of the Para-Commandos who, like him, were athletic, wily, and superb fighters. Initially, *Le Groupe Diane* consisted of only a handful of men who formed six mobile squads of officers who were "on-call" to respond to any terrorist incident inside Belgium. Although still a fledgling unit, they were there and could rely on Gendarmerie aircraft and vehicles to transport them to any spot in the country at a moment's notice. More than anything else, "Diane



Officers from the ESI K-9 cadre train with a Belgian Malinois during room entry exercises. (Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)

Group" was a stopgap until the full potential of a national hostage-rescue unit could be realized. In 1973, several *Le Groupe Diane* officers went on a transcontinental fact-finding mission to the other capitals of Europe, as well as to Israel, and key destinations in Asia and the United States. The objective of the visit was to foster ties with the special forces and counter-terrorist units established in the wake of Munich, as well as to help unit commanders design a logistics order of battle into which the Diane Group would expand. In 1974 the unit would officially change its name to the *Escadron Special D'Intervention* (*Speciaal Interventie Eskadron* in Flemish). The ESI would become the personification of professionalism and ability. The unit would adopt *l'Intervention, l'Observation et l'Appui*, Intervention, Observation and Support, as its calling card.

From its inception, the ESI assumed an all-encompassing role in Belgium's national security. ESI operators were dispatched to Brussels International Airport to secure incoming and outgoing El Al flights, as well as to Antwerp to safeguard ZIM ocean freighters. Units also set up aggressive patrols around embassies and other sensitive installations belonging to foreign governments and agencies, especially those belonging to the Japanese (targets of the Red Army), Germany (targets of the Baader-Meinhof Gang), Great Britain (the Irish Republican Army), and, of course, all Israeli and Jewish facilities. As the home seat to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Brussels was also at the epicenter of the Warsaw Pact's espionage campaign against the west and, as a result, state-sponsored terrorist activity as well. The Ministry of Defense, at the time in command of the ESI, opted to take an aggressive approach to counter-terrorism—almost an offensive stance. The ESI would not sit in its barracks and react like many of the other units throughout Europe. It would initiate and orchestrate. It would let the bad guy know they were out there and if "they" wanted an engagement they would get it.

By its very mandate, the ESI is the national hostage-rescue unit tasked with all such situations, and all heavy tactical situations inside the





An ESI K-9 handler and his trusted partner. The Belgians are internationally-recognized masters at the use of dogs in tactical operations. Note harness worn on the dog's torso designed for airborne deployments from Gendarmerie choppers. (E. Duffeler - Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)

country and outside, as well. Should a Sabena aircraft be hijacked, for example, to Middle East nation or somewhere in Africa, Belgium's military special forces entity, the Para-Commandos, might secure the airfield or an operational perimeter, but the actual entry and rescue would belong to the ESI. Although not specifically trained in bomb-disposal and other EOD work (there is a national bomb disposal unit, the *Service d'Enlèvement et de Destruction des Engins Explosifs*) the ESI is called to supervise and secure bomb sites. The ESI also works very closely with the national domestic counter-terrorist and counter-espionage service, the CBO, as well as with other Belgian intelligence and security organizations.

In the twenty-seven years since the unit's inception, the ESI has been called into action hundreds of times for incidents ranging from the routine (such as intelligence and reconnaissance) to proactive (assaulting terrorist safe-houses). Security restrictions prevent the publication of many of its missions against a whole host of terrorist groups using Belgium as either a staging point for attacks in Western Europe, or preparing to attack targets inside Belgium. One classic example of the ESI putting to practice its motto of *l'Intervention, l'Observation et l'Appui*. In December 1990, a week before Princess Diana of Great Britain was scheduled to arrive in Brussels, the ESI, operating together with Great Britain's Scotland Yard Special Branch and MI5, assaulted a Provisional IRA safe-house in Antwerp. The house was well fortified and patrolled by the terrorists, but the ESI was able to slink its way into the area unnoticed and then assault the safe-house in a split-second raid. Four terrorists were apprehended and several dozen kilograms of high-explosives, AK-47s, sniper weapons, shotguns, pistols and revolvers, and hundreds of rounds of ammunition captured. Undoubtedly, the life of the princess was saved.



Prior to an early morning narcotics raid near Antwerp, an ESI officer, wearing his now traditional black Nomex coveralls and body armor, pays close attention to an operational briefing. (E. Duffeler - Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)

Although trained to encounter, defeat and overcome all odds against the most determined, vicious and heavily armed terrorists, increasingly the ESI has found much of its work combating the rising tide of violent crime sweeping through much of Europe—much of it originating in the shambles of the former Soviet Union. In 1998 alone, the ESI spent nearly 30,000 man hours involved in combating organized crime; nearly 7,000 man hours in fighting narcotics trafficking; nearly 2,000 man hours in fighting kidnapping, hostage-taking and extortion; 1,500 man hours in transferring dangerous criminals and terrorists; and, only 1,000 hours on true counter-terrorism work.



An unwritten ESI rule is that one can never be too prepared. Here, during a pre-raid briefing near Liege, ESI officers review the blueprints for a targeted location. Note new "Intervention Unit" patch worn on all fatigues. (J. Balcaen - Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)





*With the wide-open boundaries of Europe a tempting reality for fleeing criminals and terrorists, ESI officers take great care in executing dynamic, yet safe, road stops. Here, operators deploy from a Gendarmerie McDonnell Douglas Explorer 900 chopper, the new workhorse of the ESI. (J. Balcaen - Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)*

Some anti-crime operations are routine—supporting the police on dangerous warrants being served and safe-guarding a prisoner (one deemed highly sensitive either due to the nature of his crime and chances that he will either be attacked or even be an escape risk). Other ESI anti-crime operations aren't so ordinary. One "job," typical of the mission, the mandate and the unit, took place in Morstel, near Antwerp, on April 30, 1990. At 8:40 AM, two armed men, with enough ammunition to wage a small war, entered a bank in the center of town and announced a holdup—anyone who resisted, the robbers warned, would be shot dead. A silent alarm alerted police units who, by 10:00 AM had already contacted assistance from the ESI. Within an hour, an assault team had arrived from Brussels complete with electronic monitoring equipment, the tools to make a forced entry and the usual tools of the trade—MP5s, 12-gauge shotguns and sniper weapons. A collapsible ballistic shield was removed from the supply truck and assembled outside the rear-door. Through a small slot (usually used for aiming one's MP5), the ESI commander on the scene, a lieutenant, attempted to negotiate with the gunmen, though the perpetrators were not in a talking mood. At 2:45 PM the ESI struck. Explosives were used to blow the door off their hinges and through a cloud of blinding smoke, entry afforded into the building. Within seconds, the failed bank robbers were isolated, subdued and handcuffed. Mission accomplished.

Following that incident, and dozens of other high-profile criminal intervention assignments, the need came about to expand the ESI—it was overworked and unable to meet the intense workload caused by its increasing involvement in the rising tide of crime sweeping across Belgium and Western Europe. As a result, the Gendarmerie created five



*Many ESI operators, veterans of Belgian military elite units, are parachutist-qualified though the unit's primary airborne infiltration means is heliborne. (J. Balcaen - Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)*



*During riverine operations, an ESI fire team deploys from a McDonnell Douglas Explorer 900 chopper. (J. Balcaen - Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)*

territorial units that can best be likened to an American SWAT and tactical narcotics unit. Called POSAs (the French acronym for **P**rotection, **O**bservation, **S**outien and **A**rrestion), the units were stationed among the five Gendarmerie headquarters in Brussels, Liège, Charleroi, Gand, and Anvers. Today, ESI consists of some 150 operators divided into an intervention, observation, and logistics platoon.

Service in the ESI is considered a privilege and is strictly voluntary. Those wishing to become operators must first endure the tortures of a lengthy qualification course where they are subjected to a grueling



*At a field briefing near Antwerp, ESI operators learn the latest details of a target from a unit intelligence officer. (J. Balcaen - Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)*





An ESI section leader briefs his team prior to a tactical assignment. The photograph shows to advantage the load bearing equipment and body armor worn by ESI personnel, as well as the unique Kevlar helmet/visor combination that operators have found most effective in the field. (J. Balcaen – Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)

physical and psychological examination. The purpose of the torture, as operators call the period, is not to see who runs the fastest, carries the most and can endure the most, but those who can translate mind over pain, and will over physical limitations. Counter-terrorist skills can be learned, bodies honed up and abilities improved—mental capacities, however, attitude and motivation cannot be taught in the classroom, on the rifle range or in the field. The selection process lasts two weeks with an attrition rate of nearly 50%. ESI training, the course that transforms



Complete with a small SCUBA cadre, many ESI operators are expert underwater operators with a wealth of underwater tactical experience. The Heckler and Koch MP5, a sturdy tool for any operational requirement, especially any involving water, is an ESI mainstay. (E. Duffeler – Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)



Close-up view of two ESI rappel-masters about to deploy from a Gendarmerie McDonnell Douglas Explorer 900 chopper. (J. Balcaen – Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)



the volunteer into a full-fledged operator lasts three months. Among the specialist qualifications and course available for ESI operators are: (1) combat medic; (2) explosives; (3) marksmanship shooting; (4) combat shooting; (5) weapons instructor; (6) negotiator; (7) bodyguard and VIP protection; (8) oxygen intervention diver; (9) B-Class parachutist [taught with Para-Commando regiment]; (10) B-Class Commando [taught with Para-Commando regiment]; (11) Alpine-qualified operational climber; (12) Master ropesman; (13) Defense and Evasive driving; (14) radioman; (15) combat fitness; (16) motorcyclist; (17) camouflage and concealment. Females are permitted to be operating members of ESI, but are used solely for observation and undercover work where they are most successful.

ESI's closest foreign contact, in terms of exchanging ideas and personnel as well as joint and cross training, is obviously in France and





During maritime hostage-rescue training, a squad of ESI SCUBA operators burst out of the river waters with Glocks at the ready. (E. Duffeler - Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)

the GIGN and RAID units—the language barrier non-existent, both units are allowed to cooperate freely and unhindered. To the same extent, the ESI enjoys a unique close working relationship with the Dutch BBE. The ESI also maintains close working ties to Germany's GSG-9 and various SEKs, as well Spain's GEO, Italy's GIS and NOCs, and the Moroccan secret service. Ties have also been established with American units,



"Subject in the cross-hairs, awaiting further orders!" Hooked into three separate police frequencies and ultimately controlling the action, an ESI sniper awaits his order to fire. His weapon is the Finnish Sako Ltd. 7.62mm sniper rifle (suppressed). (Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)

including the FBI HRT, and the U.S. Army's 1st SFOD; in fact, Delta has visited the ESI on numerous occasions—especially during annual CTCs (counter-terrorist competitions).

The primary weapon deployed by ESI operators is, of course, the Heckler and Koch family of MP5 9mm submachine guns, and FN P-90 5.7mm automatics; interestingly enough, the unit has begun to use the Glock Model 17 9mm automatic as well as a special—and quite mysterious—Glock underwater naval special warfare pistol. The sniper rifles include a self-designed 7.62mm police sniper rifle, the Accuracy International L96A1 and the Finnish Sako TRG-21 7.62mm sniping rifle.

ESI vehicles include 4x4 Range Rovers; armored intervention trucks; a special SCUBA equipment truck; unmarked sedans and vans for use in undercover work, armored sedans and CAT cars for VIP work; tracking and pursuit vehicles (mainly Mercedes sedans); observation vehicles and electronic surveillance vans; various types of motorcycles; and, for naval special warfare tasks, Zodiac rubber inflatable crafts. It should be noted that ESI personnel are trained to carry out daring high-speed pursuits and chases, as well as taught how to drive at extremely high-speeds and through adverse road and climactic conditions in order to reach an incident quickly. ESI personnel are also taught how to use their vehicles as ramming devices and how to break through a roadblock of other vehicles or obstacles and inflict the "least" amount of damage as possible to their vehicles. According to one French GIGN officer, "The best drivers in Europe can be found in Belgium and in the ESI."

It is just after dawn in Brussels, and some forty men have been at work for nearly three hours examining the blueprints to a warehouse near the airport that has been identified as a major narcotics location. As the



During open-sea exercises, an ESI operator is lowered to the deck of a Belgian Navy ship during exercises in the Atlantic. Increasingly, the ESI has been used against heavily armed narcotics smugglers who uses Antwerp as a gateway for all of northern Europe. (Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)



Experts in VIP security, ESI operators are thanked by one of their charges—His Holiness, Pope John Paul II. (Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht)





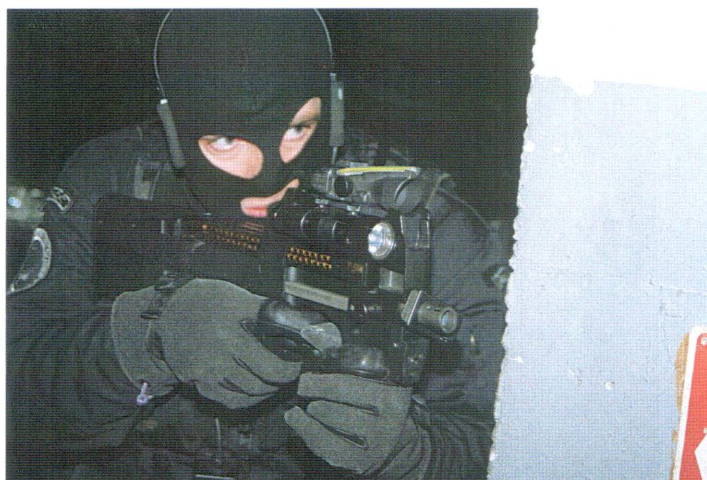
*Daunting image of an ESI operator, FN P-90 in hand, peering at a target during a training exercise inside a massive underground parking garage on the outskirts of Brussels. (Samuel M. Katz)*



*The business end of what many in the special operations arena believe will soon replace the Heckler and Koch MP5 as the operator's weapon of choice—the FN P-90. (Samuel M. Katz)*



*Compact, accurate and completely adapt to the various scenarios where a counter-terrorist operator might find himself, the 5.7mm P-90 is, according to a ESI officer, "The finest weapon we have ever had the pleasure of firing!" (Samuel M. Katz)*



*Close-up view of the intricate blowback mechanism of the P-90—for such a small package, its mighty punch is truly impressive. The penetrative power of the 5.7mm round is awesome. (Samuel M. Katz)*

men don their black fatigues and fasten their Kevlar vests and web gear to their torsos, news reports of an Afghan airliner hijacked from the former Soviet republics to Moscow emanate from a radio always tuned to an all-news station. Would the hijacked aircraft be heading to Western Europe? Would it be coming to Brussels? Many of these "old timers" joined the ESI as a result of their desire to be that one bit of difference that turned a fiasco like Fürstentfeldbrück into a victory like Entebbe. As the operators leave their barracks for the predawn raid, with the thoughts of an aircraft assault now embedded in the crevasses of their mind, they are certain of one sobering reality—in Belgium, whether it is a routine drug warrant or a hijacked airliner, missions of last resort will always fall

upon the shoulders of the ESI.

As a result of the notorious "Dutroux Affair," in which a major child kidnapping and pornography investigation was hampered by ineffectual cooperation (and lack thereof) between the Judicial Police and the Gendarmerie, on January 1, 2001, a new Federal Police force was created in Belgium. The Federal Police was an amalgamation of virtually all of Belgium's law enforcement entities into one cohesive body. Although many specialized units of the Judicial Police were disbanded as a result of this new police organization, the ESI remains as Belgium's national counter-terrorist and hostage-rescue force.





Close-up view of one of the many ESI unmarked equipment trucks—vehicles that respond with the unit to a call out and carry emergency medical, emergency communications, as well as breaching equipment. (Samuel M. Katz)



During vehicle takedown exercises near Brussels, an ESI operator uses his unmarked vehicle as cover to take aim with his Glock 9mm sidearm. (Samuel M. Katz)



Utilizing a ballistic body bunker for cover, an operator closes in on his suspected target. (Samuel M. Katz)



Armed with his trusted Glock sidearm, an ESI operator peers down on a target. (Samuel M. Katz)

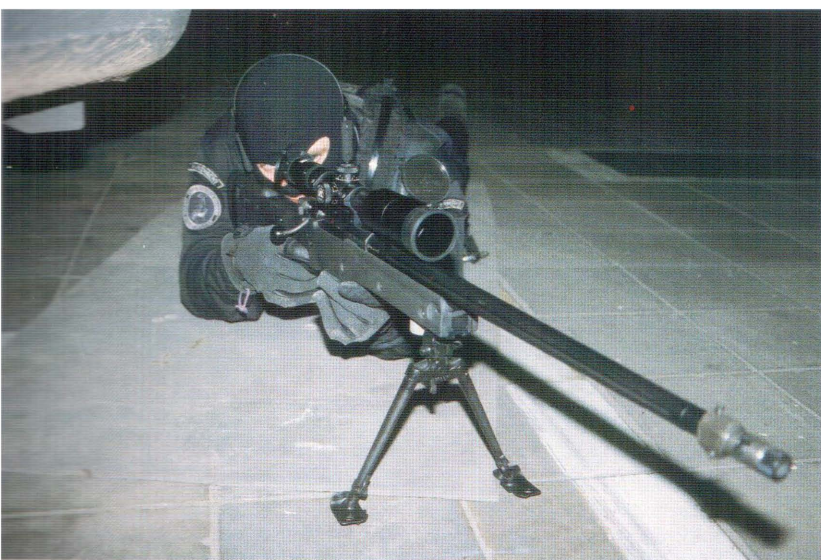




Although the ESI deploys nearly a dozen different types of sniper rifles in its arsenal, one of the favorites is the Accuracy International L96A1 "Counter Terrorist" 7.62mm rifle.



Close-up view of an ESI sniper at work. (Samuel M. Katz)



Powerful and ideally suited for the type of sniper initiated assaults that the ESI is often called upon to execute, the Accuracy International L96A1 "Counter Terrorist" 7.62mm rifle has proved itself to be a reliable and lethal tool in the unit's arsenal. (Samuel M. Katz)



Once, an Algerian terrorist who had been barricaded inside his Brussels flat was asked if the arrival of the ESI and their firepower was what finally caused him to surrender. Smiling in relief, the man simply replied, "When I saw the dogs staring at my window with their teeth showing, I knew I had to give up." The ESI invests enormous effort and trust in its canine assets and for good reason. (Samuel M. Katz)



An ESI K-9 officer awaits an hourly training session with his Belgian Malinois. (Samuel M. Katz)





***"Death in the Darkness with the Night Stalkers!"***

## **The U.S. Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne)**

**Samuel M. Katz**

A stoic photograph of a group of Rangers fast roping from the "mighty" MH-47L—the workhorse of the 1/160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). (Joel B. Paskauskas II)



The shoulder patch for the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) that is worn on the dress uniforms of the Night Stalkers. The upward pointing arrowhead shape is reminiscent of the 1st Special Service Force of World War II fame. The daggers along with crossed arrows are internationally recognized symbols of special operation forces. The matching "Airborne" tab above indicates the airborne or 'jump' status of the command.

*Service in the 160th is a calling only a few will answer for the mission is constantly demanding and hard. And when the impossible has been accomplished the only reward is another mission that no one else will try. As a member of the Night Stalkers I am a tested volunteer seeking only to safeguard the honor and prestige of my country, by serving the elite Special Operations Soldiers of the United States. I pledge to maintain my body, mind and equipment in a constant state of readiness for I am a member of the fastest deployable Task Force in the world – ready to move at a moment's notice anytime, anywhere, arriving on target plus or minus 30 seconds.*

*I guard my unit's mission with secrecy, for my only true ally is the night and the element of surprise. My manner is that of the Special Operations Quiet Professional, secrecy is a way of life. In battle, I eagerly meet the enemy for I volunteered to be up front where the fighting is hard. I fear no foe's ability, nor underestimate his will to fight. The mission and my precious cargo are my concern. I will never surrender. I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy and under no circumstances will I ever embarrass my country.*

*Gallantly will I show the world and the elite forces I support that a Night Stalker is a specially selected and well-trained soldier.*

*I serve with the memory and pride of those who have gone before me for they loved to fight, fought to win and would rather die than quit.*

Dawn has yet to break over the blue grass hills of North Carolina. The four choppers, flying in a tight formation only thirty feet from the ground, are racing in at top speed and in near silence. Silence and stealth, after all, is the currency of their profession. At a hundred yards off the target, the three support choppers, "Little Birds," unleash a string of TOW





*This mannequin displays what a Night Stalker would wear on mission. Note the specialized load-bearing vest that incorporates ceramic ballistic plates. Also of note are the latest generation of night vision goggles. Tactical battlefield equipment for conventional soldiers is designed to be comfortable and practical. Tactical battlefield for operators is designed to incorporate the maximum carrying potential with innovative design features tasked with providing comfort and practicality. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)*

wire-guided anti-tank missiles at a pillbox and fortified gun emplacement. The wire-guided missiles impact one after the other seconds later in a thunderous blast; the orange-yellow fiery balls illuminate the dawn's purple skies. There are four men hanging precariously on the landing skids off of one of the Little Birds, each carrying M4 Carbines, MP5s, and M249 SAWs. As the Little Birds land on a dime, the operators leap off and begin firing at a series of fortified targets in a cadence of automatic fire. They toss red smoke grenades at a designated LZ as a MH-47 lands in with a force of Rangers, some riding specially equipped motorcycles. The insertion exercise takes all of ten minutes, and the generals observing from ground zero are satisfied. In fact, they are impressed. "The unit is now ready for deployment," one officer tells another, and that can be anywhere in the world—from Colombia to South Korea. After all, this is the 160th!

The helicopter changed the face of warfare forever—especially in the arena of special operations. It allowed an army to infiltrate considerable military assets behind enemy lines without requiring parachute drops or large-scale troop amphibious landing followed by a full-fledged armored and infantry push. It enabled behind-the-lines operations to become commonplace and routine, and for soldiers to become truly mobile. Soldiers no longer moved solely on their stomachs—they hopped and crisscrossed a theater of operations in whirlybirds and heavy-duty choppers. In a conventional sense, the advent of the helicopter enabled the immediate evacuation of wounded personnel from the battlefield, quick predisposition of forces on the battlefield, and



*The rear view of the Night Stalker's helmet, flight suit and body armor. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)*

the knowledge that, with a few helicopters, a unit in trouble could be reinforced with a full company of riflemen. From Korea to Indochina, Algeria to the Golan Heights, Vietnam to the bleak outback of Namibia, the helicopter changed the face of warfare forever. Helicopters soon transgressed their role as transports and adopted an offensive role—with rockets, heavy machine guns and anti-tank guided weapons, choppers soon became tank killers and mini-rotary fire platforms. In Vietnam, in Afghanistan, in Lebanon, in Iraq and Kuwait and in the countless wars to emerge following the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the chopper has become the fast and lethal tool of the battlefield. Nowhere has the military revolution of the helicopter been more evident than in the arena of special operations. And, nowhere has this revolution taken such space-age leaps forward as in the United States, where heliborne special operations helicopter units possess a world-wide mission with some of the world's most technologically advanced choppers.

The U.S. Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) is without question the world's premier heliborne Special Forces entity. The unit is, in many ways, quite different than their counterparts from the U.S. Air Force's Special Operations Wings (that fly the MH-53 Pave Low and the MH-60 Pave Hawk) as they are not an offensive or electronic counter-measure entity. The 160th's primary objective is to break the aerial envelope of heliborne operations, slice through the darkness and achieve the covert and the spectacular. They must fly lower, faster, and more maneuverable than other aircraft, fly faster than the human eye can follow (useful when evading incoming rows of AAA fire), and below the reach of surface-to-air radar. The U.S. Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) must transport the very best soldiers and operatives that the United States military possesses toward an objective undetected and bring them back to base unharmed. It is a daunting task, and one that only a small, cohesive and elite force can accomplish—especially considering the fact that





An excellent view of a Night Stalker's helmet and night vision devices or NVD's. Aviators and operators in the unit are equipped with cutting-edge in night vision technology. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)

virtually all their operations are carried out at night, under the covering veil of absolute darkness. The 160th, after all, owns the night. They are, true to their namesake, "The Night Stalkers."

The Night Stalkers' motto is an acronym that every aviator and every operator memorizes long before he becomes an instrumental member of the unit. It is "NSNQ!" or "Night Stalkers Never Quit." They are among the most capable special warriors in the United States Special Operations Command's order of battle and among the most battle tested.

The U.S. Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) traces its existence to the disastrous attempt to rescue the American hostages being held in Iran. If "Operation Rice Bowl," the tragic baptism of fire for the U.S. Army's 1st Special Forces Operations Detachment-Delta, did anything, it forced the Pentagon to review its own handling of multi-service special operations. Navy ships, Marine pilots, army operators and air force ground personnel spelled disaster. If anything was crystal clear following the debacle at Desert One, it was the fact that different services bickering and lobbying for a role in a major covert special operations was nothing more than a means of self-serving grandstanding as opposed to getting the job done professionally. In the SAS, if the British embassy in Teheran had been seized, the Royal Marines would not have lobbied to have their aviators fly in the SAS in order to boast of nothing more than representation. It was clear to all involved in Operation Rice Bowl, especially to Colonel Charles Beckwith, Delta's founding father, that the most important lesson to be learned from the debacle at "Desert One" was the need to create specialized units that could ferry America's new covert counter-terrorist operators into harm's way.



Concise portrait of a Night Stalker's basic gear that is worn on a mission, minus the small arms. Note the kneepads and hard-body armor reminiscent of the chicken plates worn by Vietnam War helicopter door gunners. Small arms used by the Night Stalkers include the M-4 SOPMOD 5.56mm carbine, M9 9mm pistol and Heckler and Koch MP5 family of 9mm submachine guns. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)



The Night Stalker beret badge.

Following Iran, significant changes were made in the United States Special Operations community, eventually leading to the formation of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) based at MacDill Air Force base, in Tampa, Florida. USSOCOM was designed to act as a command umbrella, directing and coordinating the three "conventional" branches of the American special operations community. A decade earlier, on February 26, 1981, the Special Operations Division was created to command and coordinate the new philosophy of special operations warfare that had, finally, found a receptive ear in the halls of the Pentagon, and in the halls of power in the Congress and White House. JSOC, pronounced *Jaysock*, the Joint Special Operations Command, based at Pope Air Force Base inside of Fort Bragg, became responsible for America's truly covert special operations units—the 1st SFOD-Delta (Airborne) and the U.S. Navy's SEAL Team SIX.

Initially, the army developed a novel approach to the air travel requirements of its newly created top-secret covert commando forces. Because, under President Carter's 1978 "Executive Order 12036" authorizing the CIA as the sole agency permitted to carry out covert operations, a secret army unit executing covert missions would have been technically illegal. As a result, a top-secret program known as "Seaspray" was created—a joint CIA and U.S. Army aerial wing. Initially, this program consisted of several modified fixed-wing Cessnas and Beechcraft King Airs. Yet the true linchpin of the operation was a modified fleet of HIGHLY MODIFIED Hughes 500MD choppers; the 500MD, was an upgraded civilian version of the OH-6 light observation craft that had proven so effective—and invaluable—during the Vietnam War.





A Night Stalker crewmember stands watch as the engine of his MH-47 cranks up. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)

With the 500MD choppers as the vanguard of this covert force embroiled in secretive funding, "Seaspray" flourished. They could fly in complete darkness and reach speeds over 140 miles per hour and, with specially modified landing skids, hold a total of nine special forces operators. A special mechanism applied to the rotors and tail rotors produced virtually silent flight, and these 500MDs were equipped with state-of-the-art FLIR (Forward Looking Infrared). Yet only two months after "Seaspray" took off, the U.S. Army's "Task Force 158" was established as a special operations heliborne entity competing with Seaspray's objective and mission.

The unit originally was formed of attachments from the 229th Aviation Battalion and the 159th Aviation Battalion, and immediately entered into a period of intensive night flying and quickly became the Army's premier night fighting aviation force, as well as the Army's sole Special Operations Aviation force. Soon, the force became known as "Task Force 160" and it was officially recognized as a unit by Pentagon bureaucracy on October 16, 1981, when it received the official designation of the U.S. Army's 160th Aviation Battalion.

The command cadre of the fledgling 160th Aviation Battalion knew that for the unit to achieve its mandate and operational objectives, it had to instruct its aviators in the perilous art of nighttime operations, including low-level



A Night Stalker crewman wears the desert tan version of the Aviation Battle Dress Uniform. Night Stalkers are ready to deploy to any climate, environment anywhere in the world. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)

insertions in absolute darkness. Indeed, the U.S. Army sought a courageous breed of aviator to fill the ranks of 160th Aviation Battalion, and a courageous breed they found. Only the best chopper pilots in the army's order of battle were permitted to volunteer into this secretive force, and only those with unique skills and an operator's mentality were selected. Fort Campbell became a Mecca for the army's frustrated chopper pilots. Men tired of flying transport sorties or routine training flights and eager for the mysteries and challenges of special ops flocked to the Kentucky countryside for their opportunity to show that they, too, could fly-by-the-seat of their pants and do the impossible when called upon. U.S. Air Force personnel, as well as those in the Navy and Marines signed up for the chance to volunteer, as well. The flyers of 160th Aviation Battalion were a cocky bunch. They were supposed to be a classified unit, but, like Delta, were among the worst kept secrets in the U.S. Army. Their unofficial motto became "Death Awaits In The Dark" and it would have ominous peace-time implications.



The flight suit patch for the Night Stalkers. Under no circumstances is this patch worn on an operation as it is purely a novelty item within the Regiment. The Pegasus represents aviation, the moon represents the dark, the red stars in the Pegasus's eyes represent night vision, the sword represents the willingness and ability to strike quickly and the rider is "Death."

Part of the 160th Aviation Battalion's black, or covert, nature involved counter-terrorist operations. Pilots had to be able to deploy anywhere around the world with the knowledge that they would have the responsibility of ferrying operators to a location where hostages were being held and where lives hung in the balance. Often, these hostage-rescue insertion exercises involved flying high above a targeted





A Night Stalker checks the fast rope assembly on his MH-47L prior to a training mission with the Rangers. Fast roping is the preferred method of quickly and effectively getting operators on the ground. Night Stalkers are the best special operations aviators in the world. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)



This Night Stalker mounts a GAU-2B on a MH-60L prior to a static display. He wears the new two piece woodland camouflage Nomex flight suit called the ABDU (Aviation Battle Dress Uniform) that is in the process of replacing the standard green Nomex suit. On operational sorties Night Stalkers wear no markings on their uniforms, except perhaps for a Velcro-backed American flag. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)

location only to swoop down fast and hard above a plane, train or building where terrorists were held up. Often, this acrobatic flying was conducted with operators, in black outfits and all, clinging to the landing skids, as they readied their Heckler and Koch MP5 submachine guns and flash bangs for action.

The 160th Aviation Battalion's baptism of fire came on October 24, 1983, in "Operation Urgent Fury," the United States mini-invasion of Grenada. Battalion choppers, primarily the AH-6 "Little Bird," played a significant role in reconnoitering landing sites for SEAL Team FOUR to land, as well as support JSOC insertions (of 1st SFOD-Delta and SEAL Team SIX operators) to destroy radio sites, and liberate the political prisoners at Richmond Hill penitentiary. Although the invasion wasn't the true counter-terrorist scenario that the task force had been created to solve, it was a dramatic baptism of fire with the battalion being the first units into the island. At 06:15 a small aerial flotilla of modified UH-60As, flying low and fast and ferrying Delta operators, moved in on Richmond Hill prison; the armada was supported by several heavily armed Little Birds flying "shotgun." The 160th's heliborne armada came across a determined screen of anti-aircraft fire, primarily ZSU-23 23mm cannon fire, and the formation quickly split up. The attack had been disrupted and, worse, seven of the Blackhawks seriously damaged. One of the UH-60s was peppered by anti-aircraft fire with most of its controls, fuselage and avionics shot to hell; its pilot, his leg laced with

shrapnel fragments, was seriously hurt. With one chopper destroyed and several seriously damaged, the battalion had endured an inaugural welcome to America's Reagan-era "white" operations without tremendous success. In fact, much of the JSOC contingent to "Operation

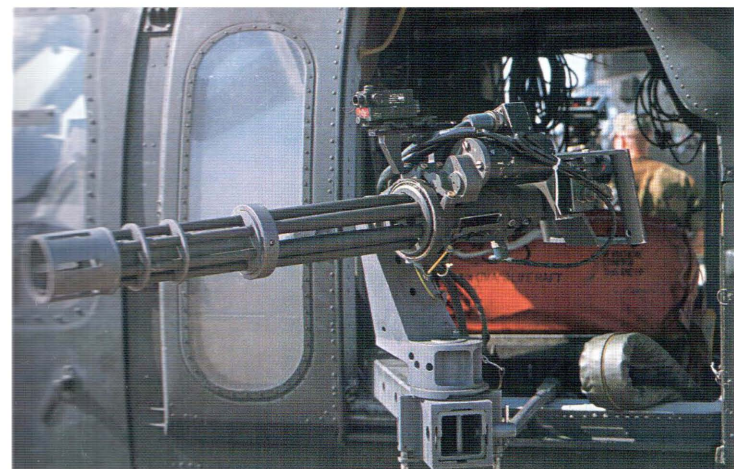
Urgent Fury" endured a less than successful baptism of fire. Delta and Team SIX assignments went undone, and the Rangers endured casualties exceeding pore-invasion estimates, as well. JSOC pulled its forces out of Grenada less than twenty-four hours after originally being deployed. Hindsight is, of course, twenty-twenty and many in JSOC publicly wondered why the choppers, from a unit dubbed the Night Stalkers, went in at daybreak at all. Clearly there was still much work to be done at Fort Campbell.



A semi-official manufacturer's patch worn by all MH-47 drivers.

Grenada was, among other things, a wake-up call and a learning experience for the fledgling components of the coordinated U.S. military's special operations command. Over the next few years, the unit grew and expanded and incorporated tactics that improved with the advent of new technology. From 1983-87, the unit operated in what operators from Fort Campbell remember as "the black period"—top-secret operations in some of the most dangerous and volatile locations on the globe with 1st SFOD-Delta and SEAL Team SIX. From published accounts, it is believed that 160th Aviation Battalion choppers ferried JSOC elements into South America for missions in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. During terrorist incidents involving American citizens, such as the hijacking of TWA





The General Electric GAU-2B/M134 Minigun. This 160th SOAR(A) MH-60L mounts two of these mighty weapons. Chambered in 7.62mm NATO, these weapons can spew 1,500 rounds in approximately thirty seconds. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)

Flight 847 to Algiers and then on to Beirut, 160th Aviation Battalion choppers were on call to bring Delta operators into action. When the Italian cruise-ship the *SS Achille Lauro* was seized by Palestinian terrorists on October 5, 1985, on the high-seas, JSOC units were again summoned to the Mediterranean once it became apparent that the majority of hostages were American citizens. 160th Aviation Battalion Little Birds and MH-60s were first brought to Sigonella Naval Air Station in Sicily where contingencies for a rescue assault were prepared. Operators from SEAL Team SIX were readied just in case the order came down for the SEALs to launch an underwater strike against the cruise-ship, while Delta operators were on standby to respond should the ship land, and the hostages be removed to a secondary location. In the end, when the seajackers brought the ship back to Egypt and attempted to escape to Tunisia, 160th Aviation Battalion choppers were airborne ready to meet the hijackers should the now legendary plan to force down their escaping aircraft succeed. That Egyptair Boeing 737 was, in fact, intercepted over the Mediterranean and brought down to Sigonella, where it was greeted by SEAL Team SIX and Delta operators. According to unconfirmed reports, Task Force 160 choppers routinely ferried Delta and SEAL teams into Lebanon on reconnaissance sorties in search of hostages.

The success of the 160th Aviation Battalion sparked great interest with conventional Pentagon planners who were always suspicious of "anything" Special Forces related—even though a series of deadly nighttime flying accidents had cast a cloud over the 160th program. In the



A U.S. Army 75th Ranger Regiment (Airborne) machine gun team fast ropes from a MH-60L. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)



Here a group of Rangers are given a safety briefing on a MH-60L prior to a fast rope training exercise. Night Stalkers support all U.S. special operations forces in the United States and, of course, overseas. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)

mid-1980s, additional aviation resources were invested within the Army's Special Operations community. On October 1, 1986, the 129th Combat Aviation Company was activated at Hunter Army Air Field (AAF) in Georgia and was placed under the command and control of the 160th. The 617th Aviation Detachment at Howard AFB was also soon incorporated into the 160th, as well; the 617th fielded five of the fifteen MH-60s assigned to the 129th. Additionally, the 245th Aviation Battalion from the Oklahoma National Guard with twenty-five AH-6 and twenty-three UH-1 Vietnam-era helicopters was paced under the overall command of the 160th Aviation Battalion.

On October 16, 1986, the 160th Aviation Battalion was reorganized and redesignated as the 160th Aviation Group (Airborne). Unit personnel were given semi-official Special Forces status and their newfound airborne status authorized them to wear the now characteristic maroon beret. In 1987 the 160th Aviation Group (Airborne) was deployed to the Persian Gulf at the time when the Iran-Iraq War had escalated to include the ultra-strategic international shipping lanes of the Persian Gulf waterways. Iranian Revolutionary Guard commando units were perpetrating hit-and-run attacks in high-speed boats utilizing nothing more than RPGs and 14.5mm heavy machine guns. The Iranians, targeting pro-Western targets, were using a series of heavily defended offshore oilrigs as bases of operations. The 160th Aviation Group (Airborne) had trained long and hard for specifically the "hit-and-run" strikes launched against the Iranian shipping targets in the Gulf. As part of each aviator's lengthy, and often classified, instruction, 160th pilots



After dropping off a team of Rangers, a 160th MH-60L maneuvers back toward a rendezvous point behind enemy lines during a training scenario. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)





During training at a counter-terrorist facility at Ft. Bragg, a 160th MH-60L provides aerial transport to a group of operators during insertion training. (Author's Collection)

and support crew-members received U.S. Navy training in carrier-landing qualifications and undergo underwater egress using the Navy's 9D-5 helo/dunker device. That survival training wouldn't be necessary in the strikes against the Iranian Mullahs. The 160th Aviation Group's strikes against the oilrigs were highly successful. The unit's MH-60s ferried SEALs and "other" special operations troops to these targets, while AH-6s proved a potent little package of firepower, taking out several with their on-board guided weaponry.

The force's next major deployment was "Operation Just Cause," the December 1989 invasion of Panama. In all, the United States military deployed over 4,000 special operations troops to Panama in the campaign to oust Panamanian President Manuel Noriega. 3/160th deployed with 3rd Battalion, 7th Group Special Forces (Airborne), while Little Birds from the 1/160th ferried Delta operators to free U.S. businessman Kurt Muse from Panamanian incarceration. Little Birds also ferried Delta commandos and SEAL Team SIX operators in the search for Noriega. Again, the Little Bird, in its AH-6 configuration, proved to be the favorite mode of transportation for America's top-secret commandos. In Panama, the United States special operations forces, including of course the 160th, faced their most capable foe since these units were formed in the early 1980s—certainly, they were the most heavily armed enemy opposition that these units had yet to face, and the most disciplined fighting force. 160th Aviation Group (Airborne) choppers were instrumental in all areas of fighting, though casualties were incurred. Two AH-6s were destroyed (one, flying at night, struck low-lying power lines), as was one MH-6. In one instance they were used to suppress sniper fire at the Panamanian Defense Force headquarters, "La Comandancia," in Panama City.



An operator rappels down a rope atop a roof at Ft. Bragg courtesy of a 160th MH-60L. (Author's Collection)

After recommendations from both the Special Operations Command and the 160th Aviation Group (Airborne), the 160th was expanded and redesignated. Although a relatively new unit, the 160th was combat tested and had earned two unit citations. On May 16, 1990, the 160th was officially redesignated as the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). The Night Stalkers had finally received their due.

The August 2, 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent American-led coalition brought to the Persian Gulf to defend Saudi Arabia and liberate Kuwait would be the largest ever deployment of the forces under the newly created USSOCOM umbrella. "Operation Desert Shield," the bolstering of Saudi Arabia's defense in the wake of the August 2, 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, was by far the largest deployment of the 160th to a full-scale and covert theater of operations.



A front view of a 160th SOAR(A) MH-47L and one of its three fast-roping positions. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)



The flight crew of a MH-47L awaits the start of a mission. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)





A front view of a MH-60L. Of interesting note is the fact that the pilots fly with the doors off. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)

The regiment's deployment in August 1990 was part of a large-scale special forces deployment to the Persian Gulf along with the unit's green beret partners, the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), also based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. In fact, the 160th's "primary" official role in "Operations Desert Shield/Storm" was aerial support for 5th Group. In Saudi Arabia, the regiment's (3/160) primary base of operations was the forward airfield at King Khalid Military City (KKMC). To the aviators "in country," they realized that the inevitable air and ground war would be one where the operator, the special forces commando, would be called upon to execute literally hundreds of deep-behind-enemy-lines operations, including reconnaissance sorties, sabotage and mine-laying, and intelligence and covert actions. The 3/160th also operated with Kuwaiti special forces and guerrilla elements in reconnoitering parts of the Kuwaiti frontier. The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) 3/160 was comprised of Headquarters echelons, two MH-47s, and eight MH-60s from 3rd Battalion and two MH-47s from the 2nd Battalion.

Prior to the outbreak of the full-scale hostilities the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) spent much of its time—and assets—preparing for their role in the inevitable conflict. This would be the first time in the unit's brief history that it would be tasked with flying through dense rings of state-of-the-art surface-to-air missile batteries and radar-controlled anti-aircraft batteries. To breach Iraqi territory without garnishing the attention of the vaunted Iraqi defenses, the 160th's aviators would need to fly fast, fly low and fly at locations where the coalition air strikes would render portions of the defense network inoperable. To prepare themselves for the task at hand and to ensure that their sensitive missions were, indeed, carried out successfully, the regiment's aviators



Operators from the 160th undergo waterborne operations training at Fort Bragg with a MH-60L. (U.S. Army Special Operations Command)



U.S. Special Forces deploy with a MH-60L aptly named "Grim Reaper." (U.S. Army Special Operations Command)

did what they did best—flew sorties. Initial training missions over the Saudi desert were carried out in ranges of 400 miles—at first, they were carried out at astoundingly low altitudes of 300 feet. Day-by-day, the altitudes were lowered until, in daylight, the chopper pilots were able to race at the astounding height of twenty-five feet above the desert sands.

The 160th maintained three specific missions during its deployment in "Operation Desert Shield." The task force was, first and foremost, positioned to stand ready for any first-strike special operations strike against Iraqi ground radar and air defense targets to serve as an opening insertion platform for the commencement of any air campaign. 160th Regiment units were also to provide bladder aircraft to refuel AH-64



3rd Group, U.S. Special Forces, deploys with 160th in rope insertion training at Fort Bragg. (U.S. Army Special Operations Command)





*During a FID exercise, operators are hoisted out of harm's way courtesy of a SPIE rig. (U.S. Army)*

attack helicopters from the 101st Airborne Division. 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) were also forwardly deployed to Rafha, in order to conduct Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) missions into Iraq to pick up downed allied airmen. In one amazing rescue, a MH-60 flew at top-speed, in full-daylight, twenty-five feet above the ground as it raced to rescue a three-man Special Forces reconnaissance team that had been compromised deep inside Iraqi territory. Evading enemy missile and ground fire, the MH-60 flew an acrobatic pattern under power wires and through gauntlets of incessant fire to reach the trapped operators. Both pilots were awarded the



*Rangers from the 75th Regiment deploy from a MH-60K near Ft. Benning. (U.S. Army Special Operations Command)*



*A MH-60 pulls a group of 75th Rangers out of harm's way on a SPIE rig. (U.S. Army)*

Distinguished Flying Cross following their return to Saudi air space—the crew received Bronze Stars with “V” Devices. And, in another spectacular rescue, 160th choppers picked up of a downed F-16 pilot shot down some sixty miles inside Iraqi territory.

Finally, of course, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) was on call to provide aerial transportation to American and coalition commando forces—from 1st SFOD-Delta operators to the occasional taxi ride for 22 SAS operators. Primarily, though, 160th Task Force served the 5th Group operations throughout the Iraqi Theater of Operations. 160th choppers brought the “A-Teams” to and from their forward observation posts along Highway 8 where the operators gathered real-time intelligence on Iraqi troop movements. Hundreds of sorties were flown inserting and extracting Special Forces teams. These operations played as much a role in the overall allied victory, as did the massive air raids against Iraqi targets before the commencement of the ground war.

Unfortunately for the regiment, Lieutenant-General Norman Schwarzkopf was not a proponent of the deployment of American Special Forces into the fray. The James Bond type exploits of these secret warriors had the tendency to steal the publicity—publicity that Schwarzkopf wanted to remain with the massive conventional army under his direct command and control. During the massive American build-up in the Gulf, USSOCOM's units were, indeed, deployed along the front lines but they were relegated to either providing FID (Foreign Internal



*This Night Stalker NCO is geared up for a security mission. He is armed with the M-4A1 carbine and is wearing a tactical load-bearing vest. Note the night vision goggles mounted to his Kevlar helmet. A Velcro backed American flag patch is on his upper left sleeve. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)*





During covert operations in the "Med" with elements of the U.S. Special Operations Command JSOC, a MH-6 comes in for a landing on the flight deck of a carrier. (U.S. Army)

Defense) programs to the Saudi or Gulf State militaries, or to endless days and nights of desert maneuvers. After nearly five months in the desert they were primed for battle and eager for the opportunity to stake their claim to full-scale operational experience. USSOCOM C-in-C Brigadier-General Carl Stiner, a man known throughout the international military community as a special forces genius, had drawn up plans at his MacDill Air Force Base command post where the 75th Ranger Regiment (Airborne) would commit deep-penetration search-and-destroy operations against the Iraqi military in western Iraq.

Following "Operation Desert Storm," the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) emerged at the fulcrum of U.S. special operations. No longer relegated to the black portion of America's special warriors, the 160th declared its capabilities to an international audience. The ghosts of the unit's first few years had been erased, when nighttime flying accidents nearly threatened the very existence of the force. Now, wherever the SEALs, the Rangers, U.S. Army Special Forces, and Delta were dispatched, the 160th would be there too. That included Somalia.

Somalia was not the type of deployment that USSOCOM relished—it wasn't even the type of mission that the special forces units under the USSOCOM umbrella had ever thought would require their attention. But when the commander-in-chief declares an objective a top-priority the units deploy—no questions asked. Somalia's mission changed, however, when the peacekeepers became active participants and the targets of warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid. On August 12, 1993, approximately 400 Rangers from the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment (Airborne),



The combat-proven MH-6 Little Bird. Both the AH-6 and the MH-6 have proven their value in both Panama and the urban battleground of Mogadishu, Somalia. The MH-6 pictured here has benches mounted on both sides for carrying operators to battle. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)



A MH-6 Little Bird with a full complement of U.S. Army Rangers on the running boards. The unit logo includes a sword toting Grim Reaper riding a Pegasus superimposed over a full moon. The Pegasus represents aviation, the moon represents the dark, the red stars in the Pegasus's eyes represent night vision, the sword represents the willingness and ability to strike quickly and the rider is DEATH. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)

were deployed to Somalia along with Delta Force and U.S. Navy SEAL personnel. "Task Force Ranger," as the element was known, also possessed a sizeable aerial force of flyers and seven choppers from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). The regiment came to the Horn of Africa with MH-60L "Velcro Hawks," heavily modified utility UH-60 versions equipped with precision navigational tools and thermal imaging sensors. The 160th also deployed with several AH-6Js, heavily classified MD-530s equipped with state-of-the-art FLIR and precision navigational tools, and configured to be able to carry a wide assortment of precision ordnance (including Stingers) and other types of guided rockets, cannons and mini-gun variations. Their mission was an unilateral one—the capture or termination—of Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid. Although the task force was a daunting special operations anvil to pit against a simple Third World militia leader, the deployment of the cream of America's special operations order of battle was incredibly risky. Armed with nothing heavier than anti-tank weapons, the operators were extremely vulnerable if caught in an ambush. If any lesson from Vietnam stuck into the playbook of the American military, it was that heavily armed guerrillas, concentrated in a free fire killing zone, can exact unyielding punishment on technologically superior forces, even those who are Special Forces qualified. The sophisticated and classified variants of the Blackhawk and Little Bird deployed by the 160th were



A 160th MH-47E offloads a fully armed and manned RSOV. The MH-47E is capable of waterborne missions, nap-of-the earth (NOE) night/day adverse weather operations, aerial refueling and special forces insertion/extraction. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)





*A dramatic shot of a team of motorized Rangers emerging from the open mouth of a MH-47E. Night Stalkers and Rangers work hand-in-hand as fellow silent warriors. Unlike the MH-47L, the MH-47E has two conformal 1,000 gallon external fuel pods. The E Model can also carry three auxiliary 800-gallon fuel tanks for refueling other helicopters at Forward Area Refueling Points or FARPs. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)*

also very vulnerable in the Somali order of battle—especially considering the fact that they were often deployed in the open. At night, the choppers, flying on instruments and the unrivaled skills of the aviators, were stealth-like. Under a Horn of Africa sun, these choppers were big fat targets that could be taken down by anything from an RPG round to a sniper's single-shot.

On October 3, 1993, a force of approximately 100 Rangers and Delta operators was flown to the Olympic Hotel in downtown Mogadishu by an aerial flotilla of thirteen MH-60 Pave Hawk and AH-6 Little Birds in a bold, and perhaps desperate, bid to seize warlord Aidid. For nearly a week, the task force had flown throughout the darkened Mogadishu skies in pursuit of Aidid in a vulnerable position, but they had failed to bring in the elusive prey. The hunt for Aidid had been a nocturnal endeavor, but on the morning of October 3, opportunity presented itself in the bright sun of midday. Once the Rangers and Delta operators fast roped down the choppers, they swiftly entered the hotel and seized twenty top Aidid lieutenants, but Somali gunners on the roof fired RPG anti-tank rockets at the hovering Pave Hawks, and three were shot down. The gunfire was incessant and engulfed the entire four-square-block area. The pitched battle should have been an inevitable sign of impending disaster to commanders on the ground. MOUT (Military Operations—Urban Terrain) always lead to heavy casualties. "It was like entering the eye of a hurricane," a 3/75th Ranger NCO would later reflect. Firing Soviet-produced ZSU-23 23mm anti-aircraft cannons, Aidid supporters succeeded in shooting down one of the MH-60s. The operation, as a result of the heroism of the Rangers from Fort Benning, was now doomed. Instead of removing the Somali prisoners to safety and departing the zone of engagement, the Rangers rushed to the downed MH-60 to save the pilots and destroy the top-secret instruments on board. A defensive perimeter was established around the chopper. The firefight grew in its intensity and rage. The air was filled with the whining swoosh of missed rounds and ricocheting shrapnel.

A second Blackhawk, providing an aerial play-by-play of the chaos on the ground was also struck by accurate bursts of 7.62mm fire. It, too,



*Here a group of Rangers get ready to be extracted courtesy of the Fast Rope Insertion Extraction System, or FRIES. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)*

attempted escape toward safer ground but could not regain the control, speed and altitude required to land the bird safely. It crashed, though far from the first chopper. Graduates of survival school, 160th aviators are also expert shots with their trademark German Heckler and Koch MP5 9mm submachine guns. Chief Warrant Officer Michael Durant, severely wounded and captured by Somali gunmen, was an aviator with the Night Stalkers. Two of his comrades in the unit, CWO Clifton Wolcott and CWO Donovan Briley were killed in the melee; their bodies were tied up and dragged through the streets of Mogadishu is a ghoulish display. For the next sixteen hours, the largest single American military engagement since Vietnam was fought with untold ferocity on the streets of Mogadishu. The firefight on the ground was so fierce that it even humbled the Rangers and Delta operators—perhaps the finest light infantrymen and Special Forces personnel in the world. 160th aviators flew an aerial cover and provided a 500-foot high "play-by-play" of the battle, greatly assisting the Rangers and Delta commandos on the ground in their efforts to regroup and attempt to hold off their outnumbering Aidid-supporting gunmen. Before the dust cleared and the bodies removed, seventeen Rangers, Delta operators and 160th aviators were killed in the melee; a further seventy-seven were seriously wounded. CWO Durant remained in the custody of Aidid's gunmen for nearly a week until he was released on October 14, and sent to Frankfurt's Rhein Main Air Force Base for a medical evaluation and then home to Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Operations officers at the 160th, hoping to heed the lessons learned from Somalia, had the opportunity to deploy again in harm's way during "Operation Restore Democracy," the September 1994 American-led peace-keeping mission to the Caribbean nation of Haiti. In the attempt to restore nationally elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power, the American military was quick to correct the mistakes of its Somalia mission. This time, Delta and SEAL Team SIX operators, along with U.S. Army Rangers and Green Berets from the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) would all be the vanguard of the American military presence. The unit responsible for ferrying this multi-unit task force was the MH-60s and MH-47s of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne); naturally, MH-6 Little Birds reconnoitered potential





A brave band of Rangers ride the rope beneath the MH-60K belonging to the 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)

infiltration points while AH-6 gunships flew aerial cover for special forces insertions before the official landing of U.S. troops.

During the first few precarious weeks of the U.S. deployment, when the special forces tasked to the operation were active twenty-four-hours-a-day, choppers from the regiment were seen buzzing the Haiti night sky. Operators from Poland's GROM counter-terrorist unit were tasked with executing dignitary protection mission and their aerial transport needs were met by the 160th (Haitian opposition groups had offered huge bounties, sometimes worth a hundred years salary on the island, for the deaths of visiting U.S. government officials and UN secretaries).

Haiti was the first realization of a new program underway by USSOCOM to pre-position Army special operations units on naval vessels for immediate deployments in the world's trouble spots. The



A 160th MH-60 awaits a mission on the tarmac at Ft. Campbell. The 1st Battalion of the 160th also has MH-60L DAP or Defensive Armed Penetrator aircraft that are armed to the teeth with rockets and 30mm cannon pods. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)



An excellent view of the MH-60K, with the doors removed by the pilots for greater situational awareness. The MH-60K shares the same advanced avionics, as is bigger brother the MH-47E. The MH-60K is powered by a brace of GE T700-701 engines. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)

initiative, known as "AJPF" (Adaptive Joint Force Packaging) ensured that specialized units, sometimes spearheads of larger task-forces on alert at their home basis in the United States, are deployed as probes.

Most recently, the 160th has seen action in the Balkans—both in Bosnia, in support of USSOCOM initiatives in Bosnia with SFOR, and in "Operation Allied Force" in Kosovo.

Commanders in the 160th like to boast that in a unit like the Night Stalkers, it is the man who is the machine. And, indeed, only the finest aviators will ever be part of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). The unit's legendary assessment week, designed to vet out all those who will never have a chance of making it as an aviator or crewman in the regiment consists of:

- Day One: PT testing, swimming, in-processing, additional testing, and meeting with an instructor pilot.
- Day Two: Scheduled interviews with Regimental Psychologist, issuance of flight gear, and additional interviews with the Recruiting Officer.
- Day Three: Interviews are completed, assessment flights are scheduled, and presentation topics issued, depending on your board time schedule.
- Day Four and Day Five: The review boards.

All those passing the grueling selection process are then subjected to lengthy and highly specialized training. Prior to the 1990s, individual companies in the 160th trained new personnel inside the framework



With his finger poised over the fire button, this Night Stalker gets ready to send several hundred rounds down range with the press of his thumb. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)





An MH-60K of the 1st Battalion/160th SOAR(A) performs an aerial refueling mission. This precise airborne ballet requires great skill on the part of the pilots. The MH-60K is the most advanced dedicated rotary winged special operations aircraft in the world. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)

known as "Green Platoon." The "Green Platoon" is now known as the Special Operations Aviation Training Company (SOATC).

Aviation instruction is arduous and lengthy—pilots who are vying for a spot in the highly selective unit are also called upon to learn—and master—the art of the light infantryman, the counter-terrorist and the operator. Initial instruction includes harsh physical fitness and endurance tests, as well as water survival instruction. This phase of instruction also includes an intense combat course, where 160th-wannabes qualify with the M-9 pistol and M-4 and M-16A2 5.56mm assault rifles.

Upon mastering the basic elements of instruction and passing the Army Physical Fitness Test, soldiers receive their maroon berets and unit crests at a graduation ceremony. Graduates destined for support or staff assignments then go directly to their respective units within the regiment. The rest, primarily helicopter crew chiefs or maintenance personnel, move on to the more technical SOATC courses.

Officer Orientation training is designed to meet the needs of new pilots and as a result, can last as little as three weeks, and sometimes as long as six months depending on the officer's final assignment and aircraft rating.

The initial segment of the training, Phase One, consists of survival, escape, resistance and evasion courses that are taught at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The second phase of training covers combat skills, and includes training at the Navy's aircrew sea-survival facility in Florida. The final



A fusillade of Minigun rounds impact on a burned out tank on the firing range at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)



A Night Stalker crew chief looks out the right side of his MH-60K after filling up from an aerial gas tanker provided courtesy of the United States Air Force Special Operations Command. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)

week of the phase is a transition to the "Flying Academics" of Phase Three, and includes introductions to the local flying area, aircrew coordination, operation briefings and night-vision goggle navigation.

The Third Phase of training is an intensive, back-breaking and mind-dizzying three weeks of navigation training that is conducted exclusively in a MH-6C Little Bird helicopter, while the fourth phase of instruction focuses on the intricate and intimate knowledge of either the Pave Hawk, the MH-47, or the Little Bird. Flight instruction is grueling, and lasts for nearly fifteen weeks. Terrain familiarization flight training is executed throughout the fifty states, from the snow-capped Rocky Mountains to the parched dry-lakes of the Mojave and New Mexico Desert. Pilots training in the CH-47E and MH-60K endure their first thirty hours in a simulator (new pilots receive twice as much).

The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) is built around its superbly trained aviators and, of course, three remarkable helicopter warships that are designed like, many jealous special operations units around the world have argued, "nothing else on this planet." The choppers are the MH-47E, the MH-60K, and the "Little Bird" family of AH-6/MH-6 attack and light reconnaissance choppers. According to its official description from Boeing, the MH-47E, basically a revamped version of the MH-47D, is designed to perform clandestine, long-range airlift infiltration/exfiltration missions into hostile territory under adverse weather conditions, in day or night, over all types of terrain. According to its official specifications, the MH-47E system is required to complete a six hour covert mission over a 300 nautical-mile (556-kilometer) radius, at level, day or night, in adverse weather, over all



During crew chief training at Fort Campbell, this Night Stalker releases a burst from the awesome GAU-2 Gatling gun. Note the flexible bag that flows underneath the weapon as it channels the rounds to the weapon. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)





The MH-47E as used by the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) will soon be the primary means of the British Royal Air Force for supporting 22 Special Air Service Regiment deployments around the world. (Walter Sokalowski, USASOC PAO)



The MH-47L churns a path back to base following a successful insertion exercise. (Joel B. Paskauskas II)

types of terrain, and do so with a ninety-percent probability of success. Only a remarkable machine could even boast such abilities let alone execute them on the battlefield. The MH-47E integrated avionics system (IAS) permit global communications and navigation in virtually all conditions—anywhere in the world; the system is the most advance of its kind and the most advanced to ever be installed in a U.S. Army helicopter.

The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) deploys fifty-one MH-47Es, including those formerly deployed by the since disbanded Oklahoma National Guard. According to Colonel Leroy Wall, one-time commander of the Oklahoma Troop Command (Aviation), “The MH-47E is capable of higher speeds, longer ranges, and air-to-air

refueling, and is better armed.” Most of the MH-47s are based at the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) home base at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the MH-47E is the fact that it possesses interchangeable avionics and computer systems found on the MH-60K IAS components, such as basic radios, mission computers and multifunctional displays can be exchanged between the MH-47E and the MH-60K in a matter of minutes. This capability, besides smacking of absolute common sense, means that mission attempted far from the normal and reliable supply channels have a greater probability of success since parts from one aircraft can be easily interchanged with those from



A MH-60K flies over the snow capped hills of Kentucky during a training exercise. The MH-60K carries two 230-gallon cigar shaped external fuel tanks and can carry internally another two 185-gallon crashworthy, roll-in, roll-out tanks. The 1st Battalion of the 160th also has MH-60L DAP or Defensive Armed Penetrator aircraft that are armed to the teeth with rockets and 30mm cannon pods. (U.S. Army)





During "operations and training" exercises in New York City to coincide with a presidential visit, a 160th MH-60K flies over the Statue of Liberty. (U.S. Army)

other aircraft in the regiment. What is becoming slowly the regiment's most used means of insertion and extraction, the MH-60K Pave Hawk is a superb fighting machine with incredible all-terrain endurance and, what aviators like to call, "intense and tenacious spirit."

The Little Bird is the affectionate U.S. Army name for the McDonnell Douglas AH-6J and MH-6J special operations chopper. Based on the OH-6A Cayuse observation chopper first flown for the U.S. Army in 1963, the MH-6J and AH-6J are highly modified versions of the McDonnell Douglas 530F civilian utility chopper designed specifically for use by the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). The MH-6J is the reconnaissance/troop carrying version of the Little Bird and is equipped with precision navigation, night infrared equipment and special mission equipment for insertion and extraction of two-man special forces teams and features high-altitude, hot climate engines and sophisticated avionics equipment to enhance their black mission abilities. The AH-6J is the attack version of the Little Bird, and can be fitted with a variety of weaponry, such as the Stinger and Hellfire missile, rockets, cannons and small caliber machine guns. Both variants are equipped with advanced forward-looking infrared (FLIR) and precision navigation systems. With the best aviators in the U.S. Army serving in the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), Night Stalker AH-6/MH-6s are capable of extremely precise insertions and extraction's in zero visibility. The choppers are transportable in C-130, C-141 and C-5A transport aircraft, and capable of flight within five minutes of arrival to any of the world's major hot spots. "Special operations mean special people, special training, special missions and special equipment," said Colonel Joseph Fucci, former commander of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). "Our Little Birds are tailor-



At Camp Bravo near Port-au-Prince, Haiti, a 160th MH-60K supports U.S. Army Special Forces and 1st SFOD-Delta operations on the island. (Author's Collection)



An early variant of the MH-60 provided to the 160th, nicknamed "Exterminator," flies over Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. (U.S. Army)

made for what we do. They are special and they've never let us down." The MH-6 is, perhaps the favorite operational chopper of the U.S. military's counter-terrorist assets. During Commander Richard Marcinko's command of the Red Cell unit, operators routinely used Little Birds for strikes and reconnaissance sorties. In videotape released by the unit, six SEALs are shown fast roping down the sides of a Little Bird. Although many such "actual" deployments involving Little Birds and SEAL Team SIX operators remain classified top-secret, the "bird," as the aircraft is affectionately known, remains the most effective low-profile aerial insertion tool—from the shores of "various" Middle Eastern nations, to the jungles of Asia and South America.

Finally, the true regimental workhorse is the MH-60. The MH-60's primary wartime missions are infiltration, exfiltration and resupply of special operations forces in day, night or marginal weather conditions. Other missions include combat search and rescue. The MH-60G is equipped with all-weather radar that enables the crew to avoid inclement weather. To extend their range, Pave Hawks are equipped with a retractable in-flight refueling probe and internal auxiliary fuel tanks. Pave Hawks are equipped with a rescue hoist with a 200-foot (60.7 meters) cable and 600-pound (270 kilograms) lift capacity. All MH-60s have an automatic flight control system to stabilize the aircraft in typical flight altitudes. They also have instrumentation and engine and rotor blade anti-ice systems for all-weather operation. The non-retractable landing gear consists of two main landing gears and a tail wheel. Aft sliding doors on each side of the troop and cargo compartment allow rapid loading and unloading. Many of the upgraded Hawks are equipped with M-134 7.62mm Miniguns, as well as other machine gun systems, and, of course, Hellfire anti-tank missiles. To increase the chopper's ability to withstand



Excellent close-up image of the often secretive 160th SOAR(A) AH/MH-6 "Little Bird" with its grenade launchers and rockets on display. (Boeing)





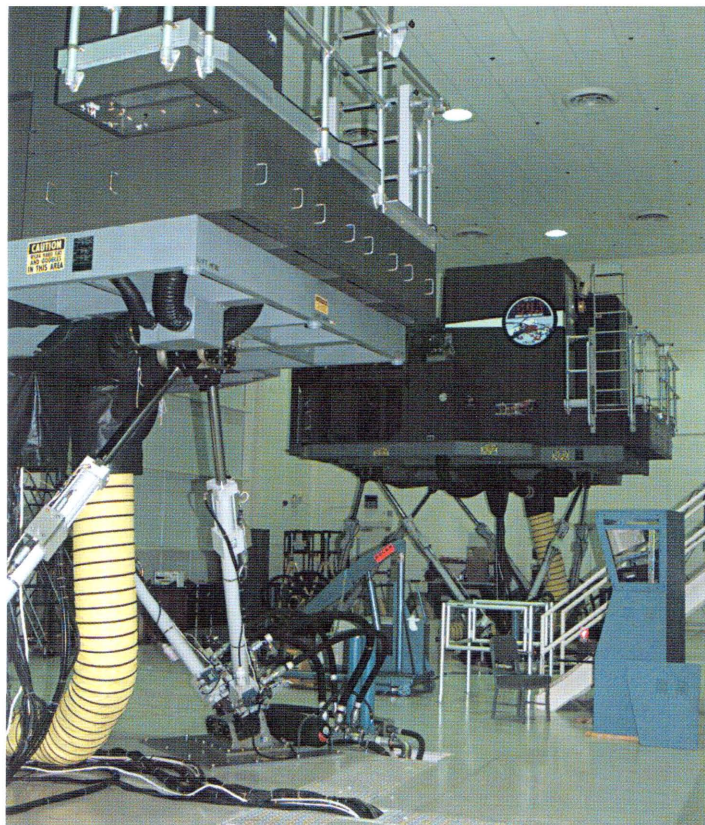
A selection of various novelty patches from the Night Stalkers. Most are eagerly sought after collectibles.

enemy fire and execute its mission, even under the fiercest small arms and anti-aircraft artillery fire, Kevlar ballistic armor has been added for increased crew protection.

According to published accounts, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) consists of the following order of battle:

- 1st Battalion/160th is the “black” operations entity of the regiment and the one that works closest with the Army’s 1st SFOD-Delta, the U.S. Navy’s “Dev Group” (the new designation for SEAL Team SIX). The battalion also works closely with elements of the U.S. intelligence community, including the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). In 1995, during the visit of Pope John Paul II to New York City, MH-60Ks were seen flying over the city and New Jersey. Many have speculated that operators from the U.S. Army’s 1st SFOD-Delta were on-call to provide security back-up to the pontiff’s visit, as well as hinting that the 1/160th was providing aerial transport to the army counter-terrorist operators. Based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, the 1/160th is reported to consist of thirty MH-60s, eighteen AH-6s, and eighteen MH-6s.
- 2nd Battalion/160th is also based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and is considered the back-up force for 1st Battalion operations. Deployed on both “black” and “white” (semi-conventional Special Forces) operations, the unit boasts nearly thirty MH-47s—the Chinooks being the sole chopper the unit flies.
- 3rd Battalion/160th, based at Hunter Army Airfield near Savannah, Georgia, is the Regiment’s “white” unit. Based in Georgia so that it can function as an integral part of 1st Battalion/75th Ranger Regiment (Airborne) missions, the battalion deploys ten MH-60s and ten MH-47s. The 3/160th was the sole regimental unit to have *openly* been acknowledged to have been deployed to “Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm,” though it is safe to say that the regiment’s “black” forces were also functioning in the desert night.

Back at Fort Campbell, the unit assembles its personnel and aircraft for that state of readiness that permits them to deploy at a moment’s notice ANYWHERE in the world. Regimental officers and aviators constantly monitor CNN and the news wires in search of the next major hotshot to flare up and their next assignment. Could the situation dictate their deployment to Kosovo perhaps? There was always the potential flashpoint of the Korean peninsula? Or could their next mission be, once again, in the Middle East, flying invisibly through the radar screens in Iraq, Lebanon or even Iran? Maybe their next mission would be to Afghanistan supporting an operation targeting Osama Bin-Laden? “The prospects for the regiment’s future are mind-boggling,” claims one Special Forces NCO assigned to USASOC’s HQ at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. According to published accounts, the regiment will be first in line for receipt of the army’s next generation of helicopter, the RAH-66 Comanche system (hoped to enter service with unit after 2010).



A state-of-the-art flight simulator for the MH-47 and MH-60 helicopters of the 160th SOAR(A) that are part of the Special Operations Aviation Training Company (SOATC) based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. SOATC students spend their first thirty hours of “flight time” in one of the two simulators. (Walter Sokalowksi, USASOC PAO)

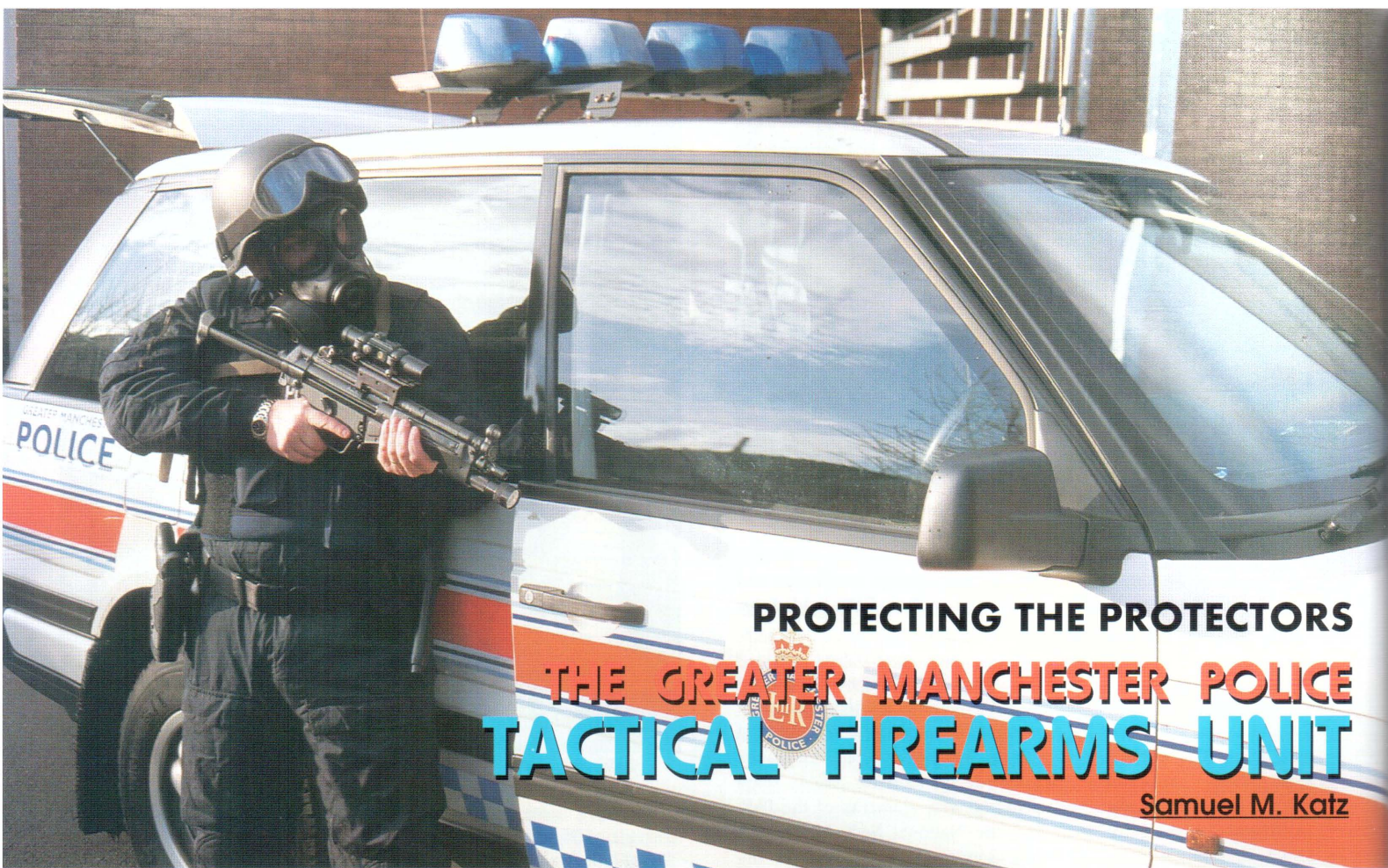
According to Colonel Douglas Brown, former commander of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), “The army’s RAH-66 Comanche, as a complement to the 160th SOAR(A)’s MH-60Ks, MH-47Es and AH/MH-6s brings a new and exciting capability to special operations. It is virtually impossible to condense what the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) is and does in a neat little catch phrase and sound bite. Their role is so incredibly diverse and all-encompassing of the overwhelming responsibility that the United States played in the Cold War, played in the evolution of the New World Order, and in the way that the world is shaping today. Perhaps, however, the true essence of the regiment is best summed up by one of its former commanders, Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Fucci, when he said, “Special operations means special people, special training, special missions and special equipment.” Indeed, according to one flight captain in the German Border Guards who flies special ops missions for GSG-9, “No greater group of aviators exists anywhere in the world.”



## SPECIAL OPERATIONS AVIATION

The subdued patch of the 160th. (U.S. Army)





*Using his ballistically-protected Range Rover as cover, a Tactical Firearms Unit officer cautiously approaches a barricaded location. (Samuel M. Katz)*

The callout was real, and it was what the men who wear a badge, Kevlar body armor and carry MP5s for a living were all about. A lone male had barricaded himself inside his home armed with a firearm. Shots were fired and much of the neighborhood evacuated as a standoff ensued. Until the suspect was either apprehended or no longer a threat to anyone, the community at large would be held hostage. A barricaded gunman holding police at bay was a slice of reality that is so common throughout the United States and many other parts of the world, yet this was being played out in quaint suburban community in Manchester, Great Britain. The tactical force summoned to end the ordeal was one of Britain's finest—the Greater Manchester Police Tactical Firearms Unit.

On November 25, 2000, at just before 1:00 PM, an ARV, or Armed Response Vehicle, with two armed officers from the Greater Manchester Police Tactical Firearms Unit, the sole division in the department allotted weapons, responded to a call of a man threatening neighbors with a gun. Yet as the officers pulled up to the house, they found themselves under fire. Los Angeles, it appeared, had come to Manchester.

For the next thirty hours, in bone chilling cold and in a driving rainstorm, some fifty officers from the Tactical Firearms Unit had surrounded the suspect's house. Negotiators attempted to reason with the individual, a middle-aged male, but the talk was of no avail. Repeatedly throughout the ordeal, the suspect fired off rounds at police officers in full SWAT kit seeking cover in the surrounding perimeter. At one point, the suspect even tossed a homemade pipe bomb at police. More than 100 residents were evacuated from the quiet residential street and taken to a nearby school until the ordeal was over.

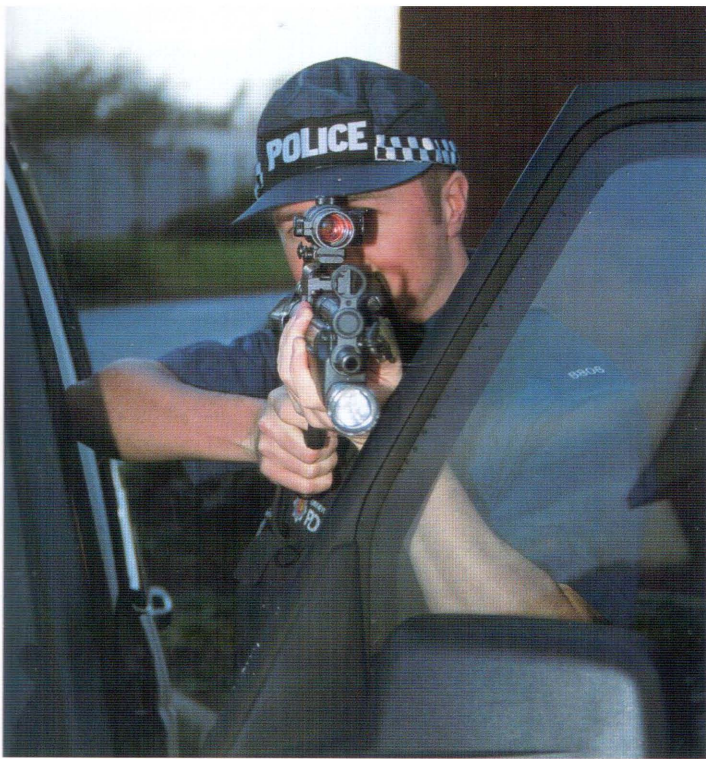
The responding officers, peering through the scopes of their MP5 submachine guns, knew that this was the type of job they had trained for time and time again; this was the job where their firearms discipline and proficiency could be tested and proven. Because the suspect had fired at police and shown such abandon for his life as well as the lives of the

police officers, many police supervisors summoned to the scene at a tactical command post believed that the incident would end violently. But the suspect was alone in the first floor of the building, and he wasn't holding anyone hostage. Time was on the side of the policemen. Even though he had fired at the responding officers and even though many of the suited-up officers had trained their weapons on the building negotiations and patience would, in the end, resolve the ordeal. Some thirty hours after the first shots were fired, the suspect surrendered.

In a nation that had prided itself for years as being immune to the firearms induced violence that plagued much of the world, situations were now common where the unarmed Bobbie was no longer enough to serve and protect the community at large from criminal assault. Contrary to popular belief, armed policemen have patrolled the Britain's streets, villages and countryside for nearly 200 years. The London Metropolitan Police force has had access to firearms since its formation in 1829 and it was common for Bobbies to carry sidearms during nighttime patrols. The modern Metropolitan Police created its full-time firearms unit in 1967 following the murder of two unarmed policemen. Many police agencies in Great Britain would soon follow suit and allow more and more of its officers and detectives to work armed. Home Office records for 1983 alone show that there were 3,180 armed police operations in England and Wales. By the mid-1980s, it was common to see British policemen openly patrolling the country's airports wearing body armor and carrying MP5s. In 1991, the London Metropolitan Police armed response vehicles (ARVs) began twenty-four-hour-a-day patrolling in the British capital. Full-time ARV patrols were established in Manchester the following year. Policing in Britain would never be the same.

The area under the jurisdiction of the Greater Manchester Police amounts to approximately 500 square miles covering a diverse topographical and socioeconomic mosaic of towns, districts and people. With a population nearing three million, Manchester is considered Britain's fastest growing city; with nearly 50,000 university students and





*Using the door of his armored Range Rover as cover, an officer from an ARV takes aim with MP5 9mm submachine gun. (Samuel M. Katz)*

the world's most famous soccer team (Manchester United), the city is slowly becoming a major financial and cultural hub of the new Europe. The Greater Manchester Police consists of some 7,000 officers and 3,300 support personnel that, geographically, ranges from open tracts of moorland to rural communities to large inner-city areas. The patrol force is divided into eleven territorial divisions that correspond with the boundaries of the metropolitan boroughs of Greater Manchester. Manchester is a unique city that has suffered through economic woes of Britain's industrial decline and it has prospered in the high-tech new economy. It is a city of contrasts and character and a city that has seen its share of crime and disturbance. In Manchester, when a citizen needs help he calls the police. When the police need help, they summon the Tactical Firearms Unit.

The Tactical Firearms Unit is split into two functions—Armed Response Vehicles and Tactical Operations. The unit consists of 127 officers who are all trained, qualified and licensed to carry their firearms on duty (unlike police departments in the United States, for example, Tactical Firearms Unit officers do not take their guns home with them). Service in the Tactical Firearms Unit is voluntary. All applicants, who must possess an exemplary service record, are subjected to an extensive selection process that encompasses a rigorous psychological and physical examination, as well as psychometric, neuro-motor skills, and an applicant's personality and ability to deploy a firearm. "We do not look at carrying a weapon onto the streets as the end of the story," claims a Tactical Firearms Unit training sergeant, "that weapon is a responsibility and that responsibility requires perpetual training, refresher instruction, challenging that officer's skills, and most of all the taught discipline on when not to use that weapon."

The initial firearms training course last for three weeks in which officers spend two weeks on basic handgun skills, and one week learning the very basics of the Heckler and Koch MP5 9mm submachine gun. Officers joining the unit undergo an additional three months of training with a senior officer who acts as mentors as well as guides. Training for officers inside the unit is rigorous and consistent. The unit's training facility is a high-tech state-of-the-art tactical learning center that consists of an aircraft hangar-like firing range which can accommodate dozens of shooters as well as vehicles for advance instruction. Several interactive training rooms also exist that combine lighting effects, sound



*During a training exercise of an armed suspect barricaded inside his home, an ARV crew meets with the Firearms Tactical Adviser to confer on a course of action. (Samuel M. Katz)*



*A Greater Manchester Police Range Rover stands proud beside the flag of the city and the Union Jack. (Samuel M. Katz)*

disorientation and other media-enhanced tools to allow the officers in the "hot seat" to experience as realistic a setting as possible without actually being on the street. The unit also possesses role-playing assets that permits one officer to play the role of an armed perpetrator and to challenge the officer in training to the most realistic of scenarios designed to mirror actual jobs and incidents experienced on the street. The firearms training, both basic and advanced, is designed to push the officer's confidence to use his or her weapon during high-stress situations where judgement and courage are often flashed together in several explosive seconds of terror.

The potential for terror is found on the streets, on patrol, by the men and women assigned to the true heart and soul of the unit, the Armed Response Vehicles. The ARVs patrol the Greater Manchester Police area twenty-four-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week, all year round. Their patrols are designed to be a deterrent to criminal activity and crime patterns in certain parts of the city, as well as to be on the street, ready to react at the first moment that a regular patrol officer requires immediate tactical assistance. The ARVs are all bullet-resistant 4.0 Liter Range Rovers specially prepared by Rover Motors for police use and built to Greater Manchester Police specification. Each ARV, manned by two armed officers, is equipped with all of the basic tactical equipment the officers could require in the field in addition to the Glock 17 9mm pistols that the officers carry on their utility belts. The Range Rovers carry MP5s, 12-gauge Remington and Benelli shotguns, ballistic body bunkers, gas masks, diversionary tools, and other emergency and protective equipment.

At the unit's headquarters facility located on the outskirts of the city, each shift commences with the Weapons Issue Officer, or WIO, distributing firearms and ammunition to each officer. The WIO maintains strict control over the issue and return of weapons and ammunition on a daily basis. A force armorer maintains all weapons to ensure that they are





Close-up photo of the equipment compartments inside the Range Rover ARV. (Samuel M. Katz)

free of any defects or other mechanical difficulties that would lead to a malfunction, as well as dealing and cataloging seized firearms, ammunition and explosives. In Manchester, the days when old hunting rifles or the odd .38 caliber revolver being used in the commission of a crime are long gone. Criminals carry anything from .357 revolvers to Chinese knockoffs of the AK-47 family of assault rifles to the favorite of the drug gangs in the Moss Side and other inner city areas of South Manchester, the MAC-10. The evaporation of borders in Europe, and an increase in commerce traffic coming in from the continent, has resulted in a large-scale influx of Eastern-bloc firearms, primarily Tokarov and CZ pistols, being smuggled into Great Britain. Many of these weapons find their way to Manchester. Drug gangs protect their turf with firearms and they enforce their enterprise by rule of the gun. It is known for eleven-year-old-boys to carry MAC-10s on mountain bikes when carrying drugs from location to location. Kneecappings, drive-by shootings and assassinations have become common. According to one Tactical Firearms Unit supervisor, "The gun culture in some districts is almost seen as a fashion accessory rather than an instrument to commit crime by teenagers who aren't aware of the dangers and capabilities of these weapons." The weapon proliferation has become so serious that in certain press reports the city is referred to as "Gunchester." However the police are responding positively to the armed criminal by proactive policing, intelligence gathering and the ready deployment of armed officers in such areas to protect the public and the unarmed officers.

That marked increase in the use of firearms has made the ARVs incredibly busy. Gun crimes in 2000 have increased by twenty-five-percent showing that from April 1 to September 30, 2000, guns were used in the commission of 788 criminal acts. Manchester is seeing a dramatic rise in violent gun offences. In three weeks last September alone, seven



Listening in on divisional radio chatter as they peer down the scopes of their MP5 9mm submachine guns, Police Constables Stuart McCann and Dave Wilcock keep a close eye on a barricaded location. (Samuel M. Katz)



The police cap and MP5—staples of the Greater Manchester Police Tactical Firearms Unit officer's daily kit. (Samuel M. Katz)

people were shot, including a sixteen-year-old riding his bicycle in a park. To tackle the growing phenomenon, the Tactical Firearms Unit has been deployed to troubled area to act as a mobile and armed deterrent force.

Primarily, the ARVs are tactical first responders who are the first to respond to an armed incident and must either resolve the situation, or contain it until the Tactical Operations Team, the other half of the Tactical Firearms Unit tandem, arrives on the scene. Officers in the Tactical Operations Team work mainly in preplanned operations where dangerous criminals who are armed are known to be active. Their primary function is to serve high-risk arrest warrants on individuals who are known to be armed and who have at a propensity for violence in their past. The Tactical Operations Team also responds to barricade incidents where an armed criminal is locked inside a location or when that individual has taken hostages. Although armed with identical weapons to the men and women in the ARVs, the unit can also deploy a higher caliber of firepower. The officers in the Tactical Operations Team are equipped with Glock 17s and MP5s but they are also equipped with Heckler and Koch HK53 5.56mm assault rifles as well as Benelli 12-gauge shotguns used for breaching doors. The team's snipers deploy both



Each ARV is equipped with ballistic body bunkers that allow responding firearms unit officers to deploy as first responders to virtually any tactical situation in the police force area. (Samuel M. Katz)





*An ARV crewmember clutches his Remington 870 12-gauge shotgun as he receives instructions from responding supervisors on a mobile telephone. (Samuel M. Katz)*

the PSG-1 and the Accuracy International L96A1 7.62mm sniper rifle, but these are only brought out on serious incidents and call outs.

Both for warrant service, as well as hostage-rescue operations, the unit deploys a wide variety of tactics—from covert to dynamic entries. Serving warrants on drug locations and on gang targets provides the team with excellent hand's on experience in what can never be replicated in a training scenario—a real life job. When the officers have to deal with those desperate few moments when a door is kicked in, a diversionary device tossed on the ground, both as individuals and as a cohesive force, the hand's on experience permits skills to be honed and challenges to be identified and addressed.

The Tactical Operations Team is also tasked as a first response force to a terrorist incident. Although much of the IRA activity in Great Britain has been restricted to London, Manchester has not been immune from the carnage of indiscriminate terrorist attacks. At 11:20 AM on Saturday June 15, 1996, a massive 3,300 lb bomb exploded in the shopping center of downtown Manchester. The massive blast was the work of the IRA. Police estimated that some 100,000 lives were placed at risk by the bomb but prompt police action ensured there were no fatalities. The most serious injuries were caused by falling glass over 300 meters from the site of the explosion. The bomb, the largest terrorist device ever detonated on the British mainland, inflicted damages that were estimated at approximately £700 million.

The shadow of terrorism looms large for the Greater Manchester Police and the Tactical Firearms Unit. On the night of July 25, 2002, the 17th Commonwealth Games will open in Manchester bringing some 5,000 athletes from seventy-two nations to the city for a ten day sporting event. The Commonwealth Games will bring tens of thousands of visitors and dozens of world leaders to Manchester, as well as the potential for one group or another using the games as a convenient target by which they can publicize their cause. To prepare for the burden that the department will face during the games, along with the counter-terrorist challenges, the Tactical Operations Team has increased the scope and mandate of its hostage-rescue training. "There is always the possibility that someone or some group will use the games as a high-profile media platform and test our will and limits," claims a Tactical Firearms Unit veteran officer patrolling through the Moss Side, one of the more notorious areas of the city for guns and violence, "but we have to be ready



*An ARV crewmember takes aim with his Remington 870. The door of his armored Range Rover equipped with slide-down panels that provide ballistic cover to the officer from the ground to his shoulders. (Samuel M. Katz)*

to work with Special Branch and elements within our own department to gather as much intelligence on these individuals as possible, and we must be ready to be able to respond smartly and forcefully to anything they'll throw our way." In preparation for the Commonwealth Games, the Tactical Firearms Unit has begun an intensive hostage-rescue-training regimen that includes assaults on buses, light rail, and the housing units where the athletes will live.

The Tactical Firearms Unit makes an enormous effort to maximize its training days and to make actual exercises in the field be as realistic as possible. On a cool winter's morning, only days before Christmas, motorists traveling on a busy motorway on their way to shops inside the city center were alarmed to see swarming armada of highway patrol cars along with two ARVs pursuing two men in a Rover at high speeds. The police chase, on one of Manchester's busiest motorways, was a training exercise designed to coordinate the efforts of the pursuing highway vehicles with the armed officers who would be tasked with conducting the road stop and search of the vehicle. Once the targeted vehicle was forced to the side of the road, the ARV officers emerged from their vehicles, MP5s and Glockes in hand and at the ready. In a slow and deliberate fashion, the ARV crews called for the suspects to leave their vehicles, interlock their hands behind their heads, and kneel to the ground. As a police chopper buzzes overhead circling at low altitude, the ARV crews maintained a close watch over the suspects. As one of the four armed officers conducted a meticulous search of the Rover, including a search of the trunk with his gun at the ready, the suspects are frisked and taken into custody. The training scenario will be repeated throughout the morning on several of the city's thoroughfares, but the training is serious. In April 1999, five people were shot and much of the Greater Manchester area held hostage by three armed men who held hostages, shot at passersby as well as at police with AK-47 assault rifles, and led police on a sixty-five mile chase. The terrifying chase came to an end when gunmen lost control of their hijacked BMW and crashed it in a northern part of the city. Following the exercise, the ARV crews will sit down with their counterparts in the highway unit to review the aerial footage filmed by the police chopper and to critique each and every





Police Constable Mark Williams from the Tactical Firearms Unit poses in the unit arsenal cradling an Accuracy International L96A1 7.62mm sniper rifle. (Samuel M. Katz)

aspect of the training scenario. The officers will analyze everything from driving skills, to evasive techniques, to what are the best ways to force a car to stop when zooming along at nearly 100 miles-per-hour, in the hope of improving their responses the next time. "The next time we get a call of shots fired from a vehicle being pursued by police," claims one of the officers involved in the training exercise, "we have to be smarter and better equipped than the criminal element. It was a miracle that nobody was killed that day. It's a miracle that none of us were killed. We might not be so lucky the next time."

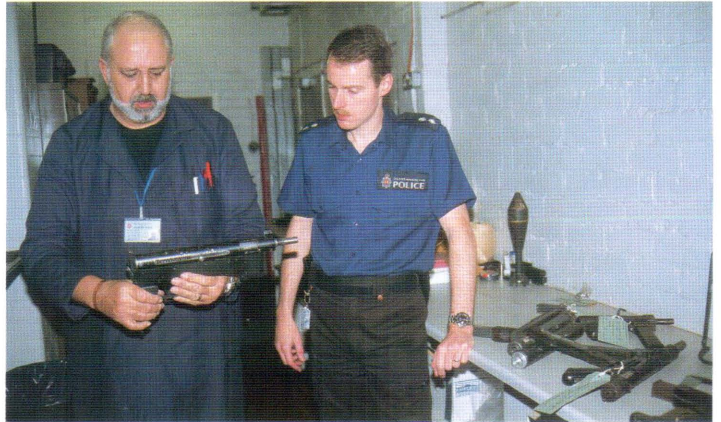
The noted mission statement of the Greater Manchester Police Tactical Support Section is a clear and compact job description of what this volunteer force does on the streets of the city and the surrounding areas. *"We will provide quality support and specialist operational services to divisions and departments, together with front-line services, in order to uphold the law fairly and firmly by preventing crime, bringing law breakers to justice and keeping the peace and protecting and*



An officer takes aim with his MP5 9mm submachine gun. (Samuel M. Katz)



Inspector Brian Davies, one of the Tactical Firearms Unit supervisors, checks a wall with HK53 assault rifles in the force arsenal prior to a training assignment. (Samuel M. Katz)



Peter Lunn, the force armorer, and Inspector Brian Davies examine a homemade fully operational 9mm submachine gun used in the commission of a drug-related shooting in Manchester. (Samuel M. Katz)

*reassuring the community."* In reality, the Tactical Firearms Unit's mission statement is seen on a daily basis in Manchester in the day-to-day operations of the force's officers. It is tangible on the streets of the city as the ARVs patrol the avenues and roundabouts in support of their fellow officers. The mission statement is seen in the determined eyes of the balaclava-clad officers in the Tactical Operations Team ready their breaching rounds and their flexicuffs for a narcotics warrant to be served on a murderous gang in the Moss Side. The officers know that their mission isn't always understood in a land where the words police and guns are usually not in the same sentence. But the tactical specialists from the Tactical Firearms Unit have carved a thin blue line in the sand determined to fight guns and those keen to use them on the streets of Manchester.



A Tactical Firearms Unit officer receives the call of a vehicular pursuit involving armed felons over divisional radio. (Samuel M. Katz)





After their ARVs have boxed in a suspect vehicle attempting to flee police, the crews order the suspects out of their cars with weapons drawn. (Samuel M. Katz)



A dangerous moment on any car stop of fleeing felons—an ARV crewmember pops open the trunk of a suspect vehicle in search of additional armed perpetrators. (Samuel M. Katz)



ARV officers approach two suspects, already laid on the ground, during car-stop training with responding highway and aviation assets. (Samuel M. Katz)

A Tactical Operations Team sniper peers through the scope of his Accuracy International L96A1 7.62mm sniper rifle—one of the unit's favorite long guns. (Samuel M. Katz)



Making sure that car stop suspects do not move as they are being searched by responding officers, an ARV crewman keeps his Glock trained and at the ready. (Samuel M. Katz)



A Tactical Firearms Unit Range Rover and one of the unit's departmental supports—the Air Support Unit Aérospatiale AS.355E Twinstar. (Samuel M. Katz)







*The choice sniper rifle of the British military, the Accuracy International L96A1 7.62mm sniper rifle is ideally suited for the rough weather and diverse terrain of the Greater Manchester area. (Samuel M. Katz)*

### The Tactical Aid Unit

The Tactical Firearms Unit falls under the command and control of the Tactical Support Section, which is part of the Specialist Operations Branch. The other unit in the Tactical Support Section is the Tactical Aid Unit, or "TAU," which can operate anywhere in the force area for crowd control and support to the patrol officers as well as the Tactical Firearms Unit. Their functions include:

- **DIVISIONAL ASSISTANCE:** Assisting the department with local crime-fighting initiatives and quality of life concerns.
- **PUBLIC ORDER SITUATIONS:** Providing a presence to locations where intelligence suggests that a large-scale disturbance could take place, such as labor demonstrations and football matches.
- **TACTICAL SEARCHES:** The Tactical Aid Unit is tasked conducting three types of searches in support of force operations:
  - (a) **Offensive:** arresting individuals on a warrant, or entering their residences or businesses to execute the arrest.
  - (b) **Defensive:** searching areas where security can be compromised, such as on terrorist bomb threats.
  - (c) **Crime Scene:** Searching for intricate pieces of evidence in the investigation of a major crime.
- **EFFECTIVE ENTRY:** Gaining access to locations that need to be searched, or locations that need to be entered to execute a warrant.
- **SAFE ACCESS:** Working in confined spaces, heights, or other dangerous locations where rescue equipment must be deployed.
- **HOUSE TO HOUSE INQUIRIES:** Conducting door-to-door searches and inquiries following the commission of a major crime, or following a bombing incident.
- **SEARCH AND RECOVERY:** Responding to major disasters, such as a plane crash, and assist in the recovery and identification of casualties as well as looking for evidence.
- **COURT SECURITY:** Escorting high-risk prisoners to trial and enhancing overall court security.
- **ARREST TEAMS:** Assisting central crime units in major operations.

In addition to their normal operations and instructions, the Tactical Aid Unit is also responsible for specialist public order tactics, trauma first aid, and dynamic building entry techniques.



*The unit deploys Tactical Command Post Vehicle on all major incidents. (Samuel M. Katz)*



*One of the fully armored Land Rovers used on major incidents where shots are fired by responding Tactical Firearms Unit personnel. (Samuel M. Katz)*



*Peering down the Aim point ultra-sight electronic sighting system of his MP5 9mm submachine gun, a Tactical Operations Team officer covers the advance of fellow officers during hostage-rescue training. (Author's Collection)*





As an instructor looks on, Tactical Operations Team officers negotiate a ladder while assaulting a mock two-story structure. Note Tactical Operations Team officer readies his Benelli 12-gauge shotgun for a breaching exercise.



When the lives of hostages are on the line, rescuing officers need to assault a targeted location through multiple entry points. Here, during Tactical Operations Team hostage-rescue training, unit officers storm a besieged location through a first and second floor entry.



With an ample supply of shot-lock rounds strapped to his left thigh, a Tactical Operations Team breacher prepares to pop open a locked door during unit hostage-rescue training.

A Tactical Operations Team officer readies his Benelli 12-gauge shotgun for a breaching exercise.





# The Royal Gurkha Rifles Britain's Foreign Elite

Carl Schulze

*A type of RAF aircraft that is regularly used by the Gurkha infantry is the Puma transport helicopter. Here two Pumas fly in troops of the Gurkha Reinforcement Company, B Company, PWRR. (Carl Schulze)*

As you watch the patrol from 1st Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles move through the jungle, your first impression is that it is sunset. Actually, the twilight in which they travel is caused by the jungle canopy made up of the leaves of tall, several-hundred-year-old jungle foliage, which blocks most of the sunlight even at midday. The thick undergrowth makes traveling a nightmare, and the average distance that can be covered while operating in thick jungle is only a meager 3 km (1.9 miles). The humidity and the heat make breathing difficult, and carrying a load like a heavy Bergen rucksack becomes torture. Even though it is not yet raining, the clothes of the Nepali-born Gurkha soldiers are wet from sweat and from crossing the innumerable small rivers that flow in nearly every valley. Another disadvantage of the close jungle canopy is that it causes every sound to echo, letting it be heard over a very long distance and making it necessary to prevent every noise possible while moving. Silently the Gurkhas move forward, pausing to look in all directions every time they take another step. Their movement resembles a motion picture being shown in slow motion. But in the jungle the usual field of vision is between 5 to 10 meters (15 to 32 feet) and battles are fought in very close quarters, which means every patrol member must carefully observe the surrounding jungle in order to avoid running into an enemy ambush.

The patrol, a section of eight men from A Company, 1st Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles, is led by the four-man-strong Fire Team Charlie, while the other four soldiers, belonging to Fire Team Delta, follow at a distance of 10 to 15 meters (32 to 50 feet). Constantly counting their steps and checking the bearing on their compass, the patrol members move in a single file led by two scouts, each one carrying an SA-80 L85 A1 assault rifle. With a distance of 3 to 5 meters (10 to 15 feet) between each soldier, they are followed by the section commander and a light machine gunner with an LSW (Light Support Weapon). Fire

Team Delta is led by two riflemen. They are in turn followed by the section's 2 IC, who is also armed with an assault rifle. The last man is the section's second LSW gunner.

While the above action took place in Gathiuru jungle warfare training area in Kenya as part of a jungle warfare training package during 1 RGR's exercise "Grand Prix 3/99", the scenario could soon become a reality for the Gurkhas. For Special Ops the visit to 1st Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles, during their exercise in Kenya, was a welcome opportunity to cover Britain's famous elite fighting force.

## Exercise "Grand Prix 3/99"

Supported by British Army Training Liaison Staff Kenya (BATLSK), the British Army every year conducts three "Grand Prix" exercises in Kenya. Each of these exercises allows an infantry battle group to conduct all arms training on a battle group level in a challenging environment with extended lines of communication. For the 1st Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles (1 RGR), exercise "Grand Prix 3/99" began on 20 October 1999 with the arrival of the battalion's activation party in Kenya and ended with the redeployment of the last troops on 16 December to Church Crookham in the UK. The main body of the 1 RGR battle group arrived in Nairobi between the 1st and 5th of November, where vehicles and equipment were taken over at BATLSK. Then the force moved on to Nanyuki, where the national support group is based. In total, the 1 RGR battle group numbered 747 personnel and was composed of elements from the following units:

- 1st Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles
- 7 (Sphinx) Commando Battery, 29 Regiment Royal Artillery
- Gazelle Flight of 661 Squadron, 1 Regiment Army Air Corps
- A troop of 20 Field Squadron, 36 Regiment Royal Engineers
- RMP team from 158 Provost Company





*This Gurkha proudly wears the beret and crossed-kukri badge of 69 Field Squadron, Queen's Gurkha Engineers, which today belongs to 36 Engineer Regiment based in Maidstone in the United Kingdom. In the past, the Queen's Gurkha Engineers consisted of 67, 68 and 69 Gurkha Field Squadron, as well as 70 Gurkha Field Park Squadron, and formed part of the Hong Kong-based Brigade of Gurkhas. Today only 69 Field Squadron, Queen's Gurkha Engineers survives. It moved from Hong Kong to Maidstone when the city was turned over to China. (Carl Schulze)*

- SASC Advisor
- Rear Link Detachment from 30 Signal Regiment
- Attached Medics
- ATO, LRS and PC Detachment

The exercise was divided into five phases. Phase One was the deployment of the troops between 20 October and 5 November. This was followed by the second phase, the Acclimatization Phase, in which the troops began with low-level training and established the training facilities, as well as the accommodation areas in Dol Dol, Mpala Farm, Gathiuru and Archers Post. Once this was achieved, on 12 November the Company Rotation Phase began for the combat elements of the battle group, with one week each of jungle training, live firing, dry training and adventure training. On 4 December the whole battle group moved to Archers Post where Phase Four, a field training exercise that included a number of company attacks, was conducted. This ended on 9 December, and after all equipment was cleaned and returned to BATLSK, the recovery phase ended on 16 December with the last troops leaving Kenya.

"There are few better areas in the world for infantry training. In fact I maintain that the land battle for the Falkland Islands was won on the training areas of Kenya, as most of the battalions that took part in Op Corporate had trained there within the last year or so." So said General Sir Frank Kitson KCB, CBE, MC, ADC Gen. The training areas of Kenya provide some of the finest infantry training in the world. The variation of altitude at the equator provides a wide variety of climates and terrain in a very small area, offering the jungles and forests of Kathendini and Gathiuru, the high altitude scrub bush of Ol Pejeta, Solio, Dol Dol and



*Armed with an SA-80 assault rifle, a Gurkha of B Company, 1 RGR stands sentry duty outside the company HQ during 1 RGR's Kosovo deployment. Note the blue company flag flying above. A Company received a red banner and C Company flies a yellow one. (Carl Schulze)*

Mpala Ranch, and the almost desert conditions of Ol Kanjao and Archers Post, all within a radius of 150 km (93 miles). And the size of the training areas is amazing. For example, Archers Post, only one of the nine available training areas, measures 1,500 square kilometers (931 sq mi), which is about twice the size of Salisbury plain, the largest training area in the UK.

The UK started to conduct training for light role infantry battle groups here shortly after it granted independence to Kenya in December 1963. Archers Post and Kathendini formally are Kenyan Army training areas, but all others are set aside for British Army training. With a permanent staff of seven and another 23 posted on a six-month rotation basis, the staff of the British Army Training Liaison Staff Kenya is considered to be a rather small detachment. Manpower is provided by a large number of local civilian employees who are tasked with all types of work necessary for all of the infantry battle groups and the Special Air Service Regiment to train without interruption. This can also be considered the main task of BATLSK. For this reason the HQ maintains good relations with the Kenyan government and the local communities of the training area regions, as well as the private land owners.

While the SAS usually brings its own vehicles, the battle groups receive their vehicles and all heavier equipment from BATLSK stores, which are situated in the Kenyan Army's Kahawa barracks in northern Nairobi, along with the BATLSK HQ and other facilities. The units' vehicle park numbers an average of 400, ranging from Land Rover 90- and 110-over-4s to Bedford trucks, mini buses, buses, and some heavier trucks and trailers. It also includes engineer equipment and some 105mm Light Guns.





While part of the now-rerolling 5 Airborne Brigade, the Gurkha battalions wore a DZ flash in the form of a black triangle for identification. Note the IWS (Individual Weapon Sight) night scope fitted onto the soldier's assault rifle. Attached just before dusk, the IWS is mounted on the same mounting as the SUSAT. (Carl Schulze)

### **Gurkhas Live-Firing Package - Sharpening the Elite's Teeth**

A good inside view on how the British Army keeps its elite infantry fit to fight was the live-firing package conducted by 1 RGR. "We designed this package to build up the live-firing skills on all levels, from the individual to the entire company", stated Captain Rex, the officer in charge of the direction staff on the Mpala ranges. "The five-day live-firing package conducted at the Mpala Farm ranges begins on Day One with the zeroing in of all the weapons of the rotating company," he continues. "This is followed by close-quarter battle runs made in pairs and the four-man fire teams, mainly to build confidence in the use of live ammunition and to test and develop basic skills." On Day Two each section took part in three different section attacks. These were designed to test the tactical knowledge and leadership skills of the Gurkhas' section commanders. The soldiers were tested on individual skills, like battle preparation and movement on the ground, and went through fire and maneuver drills.

The scenarios included an assault on two different enemy bunkers, a section attack in which an enemy tank had to be engaged by two LAW 94mm antitank weapons from each section, and breaking into an enemy trench system using live hand grenades at close quarters. During Exercise "Grand Prix 3/99", 1 RGR took the opportunity to fire a majority of their annual contingent of LAW 94mm weapons since the security measures in Kenya allow a more realistic use of the weapon than the very restricted static use in the UK.

Following the section level operations, platoon level attacks — two at daylight and a third at night — were conducted on Day Three. In this phase the platoon commander was tested in his skill to lead and



Two Land Rover 110 XDs of the recce platoon of 1st Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles perform one of their daily patrols in the area of Lipjan in Kosovo during the unit's deployment as part of KFOR. As part of the HQ Company of the Battalion, recce platoon can field six of these Land Rover gunships and is 24 soldiers strong. In the photograph the patrol is seen conducting vehicle checks at a temporarily established checkpoint. (Carl Schulze)



Easily identified by his blue DZ flash and para wings, this Gurkha belongs to the Gurkha Reinforcement Company, C Company, 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment. Rather than the issued ration packs, which are not really designed to satisfy the Gurkhas' tastes, the boys enjoy East Asian-type noodle and rice MREs (Meals Ready to Eat), which they purchase privately. The once-planned introduction of special ration packs designed for Gurkhas was abandoned due to the reduction in the number of Gurkha troops. (Carl Schulze)





*Wearing their Mk 6 ballistic helmets, a crew of one of the Land Rover 110 XD gunships of recce platoon, 1st Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles is seen here on patrol. While the two soldiers in the rear of the vehicle are armed with SA-80 assault rifles, the soldier next to the driver operates the pintle-mounted GPMG. Note that the ammunition of the belt-fed GPMG consists of a mix of rounds, including tracers. (Carl Schulze)*

coordinate his sections and to react to the situation while he relies on the information provided by his section commanders. Additional realism was added through the use of a GPMG SF (sustained fire from general purpose machine gun), which provided cover for the attacking platoon while the attacks were carried out, securing the flanks of the platoon and holding down the enemy prior to the attackers reaching the enemy positions. During the night each platoon conducted a night attack involving all elements of the daylight operations.

Day Four was a rest day that could be used by the commanders for further training in the weak areas discovered during the previous three days. In addition, battle preparations for the final company attack on Day Five were carried out. This began when the company was dropped with all its ammunition at a tactical drop-off point, then moved forward on foot to a company bivouac. With the objective and all other necessary information given to the company commander, the company then advanced toward contact. During this movement, the safety staff stayed well behind to allow the soldiers to get the feel of a real operation.

The first contact with the enemy was designed as a surprise to test the reaction of the Gurkhas' company commander (as well as his sub-commanders) to the changing situation. Just as with the platoon assaults,



*Coming from the high-altitude Himalaya region, the Gurkha soldiers are well adapted for long distance marching with heavy loads. In this case, the load is only a day pack. The Gurkhas of 1 RGR are moving toward a departure line of an attack that is planned to hit the enemy positions at dawn. (Carl Schulze)*



*Wearing combat body armor, this LSW gunner watches carefully while his comrades speak to an old Gypsy woman whose house was burned by Albanians the night before. The soldier wears a bush hat instead of a combat helmet. This is a common practice in the British Army on peacekeeping operations to show the locals that there is no threat and that normalcy is returning. (Carl Schulze)*

GPMG SF and .50 caliber machine guns were once again used to suppress the enemy while the attack was taking place. An FOO artillery team was used to provide a realistic simulation of the interaction between the company commander and supporting artillery, while the impact of the guns was simulated with explosive devices. The final objective consisted of a well-defended village in which an enemy in platoon strength was well dug-in in some bunkers. It was situated at the end of the battle run, which stretched over a distance of 2.5 km (1.6 miles). It was to be taken by the company, with each platoon having its own objective.

Prior to this final assault, the company commander had to develop a fire plan for his fire support team and also ensure that all of his combat elements were in the right place for the final attack. Again hand grenades were used at close quarters, and all of the elements trained for on the four previous days were combined together in the challenging scenario. After going through the live-firing portion of the exercise, each rifleman in 1 RGR had fired approximately 1,250 5.56mm rounds with his assault rifle or LSW. For the whole package, which was directed by 24 officers and men of the HQ and Support units of 1 RGR, as well as the Fire Support company and attached personnel of various Army units, plus a Small Arms School Corps instructor, the following ammunition was used:

- 226,000 5.56mm rounds
- 13,400 12.7mm rounds
- 525 7.62 rounds for snipers
- 51,000 7.62mm rounds for GPMG in both the light and FS role
- 70 fragmentation hand grenades
- 79 LAW 94 mm HEAT
- A large amount of flares, smoke grenades, explosive simulation devices, and illumination ammunition





*Their C-130 Hercules having just touched down on the runway and come to a stop, Gurkhas storm down the rear ramp of the aircraft during a Tactical Air Landing Operation exercise. Usually the Hercules' load during a 5 Airborne Brigade TALO mission includes a Scimitar CVR(T), a machine gun Land Rover and a platoon of infantry. (Carl Schulze)*



*After Gurkhas from the Gurkha Reinforcement Company, B Company, 1st Battalion, the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment are dropped off by a CH-47, they prepare to leave the helicopter landing zone. In the background, the Chinook lifts off to go pick up the next wave of troops. (Carl Schulze)*

This is the total ammunition fired by the companies of 1 RGR battle group. "The preplanning and preparation for the live-firing package took us two weeks, with additional preplanning by the range conducting staff in the UK," says Captain Rex. "During this, the documents provided by BATLSK, including the training plans of previous battle group training at Mpala farm, were taken into account and proved to be of great value", he continued.

### **Basic Jungle Warfare Training**

In addition to dry training, live firing and adventure training, 1 RGR conducted jungle warfare training in Kenya. Not particularly thick, the jungle of Gathiuru Training Area makes the place ideal for basic jungle warfare training for teaching basic skills to the novice. This was valuable to the soldiers of 1 RGR since the battalion currently consists of a large number of young Gurkhas who have not trained in the jungle before, but would soon need these skills when the battalion goes to Brunei for four years in August 2000.

During the rotation phase, the Battalion's own Jungle Warfare Instructors (JWI), who designed a 4½-day training package, took over the



*This soldier can be easily identified as a member of the Gurkha Reinforcement Company, B Company, 1st Battalion, the Royal Scots by the tartan badge worn on his right sleeve. On his left shoulder is the griffin badge of 24 Airmobile Brigade. All the troops of the Gurkha reinforcement companies are drawn from the Royal Gurkha Rifles, but in some cases their origin is indicated by their bush hat badge, such as that of 1 RGR worn by this soldier. The Gurkha soldiers of B Company, 1 RS and B Company, 1 PWRR are drawn from 1 RGR, whereas those of C Company, 2 Para come from 2 RGR. (Carl Schulze)*





Gurkhas were first trained as paratroopers in 1941, and two Gurkha parachute battalions (153 and 154 (Gurkha) Parachute Battalion) existed during World War Two and fought throughout the war until their disbandment in 1946 and 1947, respectively. The Independent Parachute Company was formed in the early 1960s as part of 17th Gurkha Infantry Division. It existed up to the early 1970s. Today Gurkhas can volunteer for the pre-parachute selection course and then undergo airborne training for their wings. Once they have accomplished this, they return to their unit. But instead of wearing an infantry green beret, they wear a maroon one with their regimental badge. The picture shows an airborne-trained Gurkha of 1 RGR on patrol in Kosovo. (Carl Schulze)

job of familiarizing the soldiers with the new environment. The training was divided into two phases. Phase One, which lasted 2½ days, included basic lessons, demonstrations and walk through/talk throughs. The last two days were used to practice the newly acquired knowledge during a 2-day exercise.

Training began for the Gurkha companies with their arrival at Gathiuru and their first lessons on safety and the dangers faced during operations in the jungle. Amazingly, the most dangerous thing in the jungle is not insects or snakebites, it is “deadfall”, which is the correct term for the wood of high rising trees crashing to the ground when the trees collapse at the end of their life cycle. If a camp site is situated under such a tree or a patrol is just passing by, this deadfall can cause life-threatening injuries or even death. The “Health and Hygiene” lesson included every necessary piece of information for keeping each man fit, and the lazy soldiers among the students appreciated the rule that, due to

This Gurkha of B Company, 1 RGR belongs to a patrol operating in a small village near Magura, Kosovo where the house of a female Gypsy was burned on the night of 2 July 1999. As there has been trouble in the area before, the Gurkhas paid the town some special attention and laid a trap for the people who lit the house on fire. Unfortunately, the author does not know if the operation was successful. (Carl Schulze)



Along with 5 Airborne Brigade, some of Britain’s elite forces, the 1st Battalion, the Parachute Regiment and the 1st Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles, deployed into Kosovo. Both regiments were among the first troops to enter Kosovo on 12 June 1999 at 5 o’clock p.m. They entered ahead of the armored forces of 4 Armoured Brigade to provide a secure corridor through the Kacanik area so that the brigade could then quickly advance toward Pristina. Other elements of 5 Airborne Brigade were transported by helicopter to seize key locations around Pristina, such as the airport, which the Paras found to be already occupied by the Russians, who denied access to NATO troops. Photographed on 4 July, this Gurkha of C Company, 1 RGR is on a social patrol in Magura. Social patrols are designed to show force and to make contact with the local population. In many cases, the Gurkhas have collected useful information about the UCK, weapons and problems of the civilians on these patrols. (Carl Schulze)







Sometimes the Gurkhas are called the "smiling warriors". The pleasant demeanor on this helmeted soldier belies the fact that the Gurkhas have a well-established reputation for being fierce fighters. (Carl Schulze)



This soldier belongs to Gurkha Reinforcement Company, C Company, 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment. Every Gurkha who wants to join this company must be a qualified parachutist. As such they have served in P Company and gone through the parachute course at Brize Norton. (Carl Schulze)

the high risk of wounds getting infected in the jungle, shaving is not allowed.

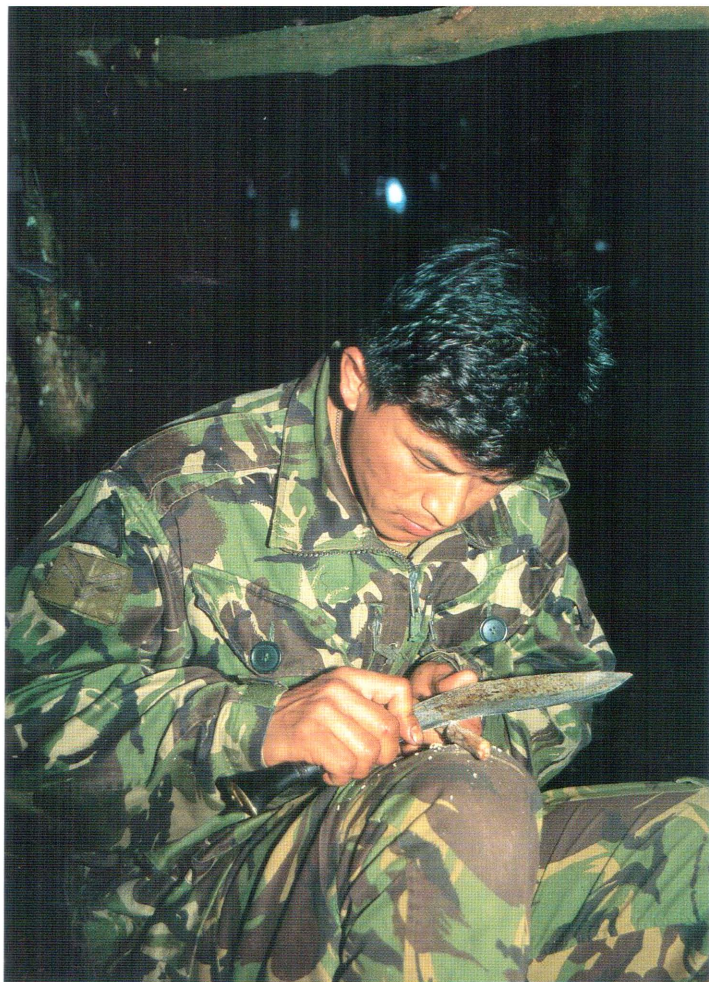
Other lessons on the first day concerned the movement of the section, such as what to do in case of contact with the enemy, navigation in the jungle (which is more complex because of the thick undergrowth and the limited visibility), as well as RV and harboring drills. These were followed by lessons about ambushing, aerial research, close target reconnaissance, and camp attacks. Most of the lessons given by the Gurkha JWs were interrupted by small demonstrations that clearly explained what things to avoid and how to do it right. The first day finally came to an end with each section patrolling an area around the location of the jungle school where the lessons could be put into practice under the guidance of the skillful JWs.

The second day covered the basic skills necessary to cope in a survival situation where a soldier is separated from his unit or in case his kit is lost. After a lesson on the basic survival skills, equipment and the correct attitude needed to prevail in a survival situation, the soldiers rotated in small groups around five stands covering the most important five keys to survival, namely: Water, Shelter, Food, Fire and Traps.

On the third day another set of tactical lessons, including communication in the jungle, were taught in the morning. At midday each platoon in the companies was tasked to move out into a given grid square in the jungle where they were to find a suitable secure bivouac for the night. The next day they would ambush an enemy patrol at a given location. Another task assigned to the Gurkhas was to conduct aerial research in one section in a grid square where an enemy camp was estimated to be. After both missions were accomplished, the company

Armed with an SA-80 assault rifle and wearing camouflage paint on his face, this soldier wears the colorful badge of 24 Airmobile Brigade on his shoulder. This identifies him as a member of the Gurkha Reinforcement Company, B Company, 1st Battalion, the Royal Scots. (Carl Schulze)





The Gurkhas are known for carrying the kukri knife, which is a fearsome weapon when used by a skilled soldier in close-quarter combat. On the other hand, it is also a tool that can be used for cutting wood, chopping meat and even carving wood. Since it is a tool used in daily life, a Nepali boy usually gets his first kukri when he is a young boy, which allows him to become an expert in its use by the time he is allowed to volunteer for service in the British Army. (Carl Schulze)

was reunited in the jungle at an RV. The next morning, after spending the night in another safe location, the trainees neutralized the enemy camp.

### Recent History of the Royal Gurkha Rifles and other Gurkha Units

On 1 July 1994, the Gurkha infantry regiments and their battalions, namely:

- \* 1st Battalion, 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Simoor Rifles)
- \* 1st Battalion, 6th Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles
- \* 1st Battalion, 7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles
- \* 1st Battalion, 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles

were amalgamated and renamed the Royal Gurkha Rifles. In Church Crookham near Aldershot in Great Britain, the 1st Battalion, 7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles became the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles. In Hong Kong, the 1st Battalion, 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Simoor Rifles) and the 1st Battalion, 6th Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles amalgamated to form the 1st Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles. At the same time, the 1st Battalion, 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles was renamed the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles during its deployment to Brunei. A reduction from three to two battalions took place in 1996 when 3 RGR merged with 2 RGR following the withdrawal of the last Gurkha troops from Hong Kong. Currently, 2 RGR is based in the UK and 1 RGR in Brunei.

Presently, the Gurkha units maintained by the British Army are as follows:

- \* Brigade of Gurkhas HQ (administrative) in Church Crookham, UK



Prior to engaging in an exercise, Gurkhas of 1 RGR apply "war paint" to their faces. This is only the beginning, though. Gurkhas are such masters of camouflage that when they have finished their work, they will be nearly invisible. (Carl Schulze)

- \* 1st Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles in Seria, Brunei
- \* 2nd Battalion, the Royal Gurkha Rifles in Church Crookham, UK
- \* Gurkha Reinforcement Company as B Company, 1st Battalion, the Royal Scots at Colchester
- \* Gurkha Reinforcement Company as C Company, 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment
- \* Gurkha Reinforcement Company as B Company, 1st Battalion, the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment
- \* Gurkha Demonstration Company, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
- \* Gurkha Demonstration Company, NCO Tactical Wing, School of Infantry Brecon
- \* 28 Queen's Own Gurkha Transport Squadron, 10 Regiment RLC at Colchester
- \* 250 Gurkha Signal Squadron, 30 Signal Regiment at Blandford
- \* 69 Field Squadron, Queen's Gurkha Engineers, 36 Engineer Regiment at Maidstone
- \* Gurkha Training Wing in Church Crookham, currently moving to the Infantry Training Battalion in Catterick

In recent years the Gurkhas have been busy conducting jungle training in Brunei. By doing so it has provided security for the borders of the Sultanate to Malaya, along which huge numbers of smugglers operate. In September 1999, the Gurkhas fulfilled another mission when soldiers of 2 RGR were deployed to East Timor as part of the Australian-led UN peacekeeping force INTERFET (INTERNational Forces for East Timor). A total of 260 Gurkhas deployed to East Timor and took part in the first phase of the operation in order to restore peace on the island.





*The 7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles, who fought together with the Cameron Highlanders at Tobruk in June 1942, adopted the Douglas tartan for their pipers. This is still worn today by the Pipes and Drums of RGR, who wear Tartan trews with their various parade dress uniforms, like the No. 3 dress, which is worn here by a soldier in Kenya. (Carl Schulze)*

For 1 RGR, 1999 started with a battalion exercise in Dartmoor which in March, which was followed by an exercise of 5 Airborne Brigade, to which the battalion belonged at that time. In May the battalion took part in another brigade exercise called "Corsican Lanyard 99". The battalion had also planned to run its Junior Leaders Cadre, but this was canceled due to the preparation of 5 Airborne Brigade to take part in NATO's Kosovo operation. Following the warning received by the battalion in the middle of May, the definitive order for the battalion to become a part of NATO's KFOR arrived on 4 June. When the first KFOR troops entered Kosovo on 12 June, the soldiers of 1 RGR were among them.

In September the battalion redeployed to Church Crookham, just in time to begin preparation for Exercise "Grand Prix 3/99" in Kenya. While 1 RGR was in Kosovo, the Gurkha Reinforcement Company, C Company, 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment and the Gurkha Reinforcement Company, B Company, 1st Battalion, the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment were busy with their deployments to Bosnia and the Falklands. Also involved in the Kosovo deployment were Gurkhas of 250 Squadron, the Queen's Gurkha Signals, who provided communication for the Gurkha units during the above deployment and for other units of the British Army all over the world.

On the logistical side, the Gurkha Engineer Squadron deployed into Kosovo in June with British troops under KFOR and provided the troops with engineer support ranging from supplying water and building camps and other military infrastructures to providing humanitarian help to the local population, including demining and reestablishing public schools and hospitals. During one of the operations, when Gurkha Engineers were clearing munitions from a previous Serb position, two Gurkha engineers,



*All of the interesting details of the Gurkha dress uniform can be seen on these two pipers. Sewn to the cloth on the pipes are the badges of the King's Royal Hussars and other regiments that have close ties to the Royal Gurkha Rifles. The pipers wear the pillbox-style hat, which has been worn by the Gurkhas since the days of Queen Victoria. (Carl Schulze)*

a lieutenant and a sergeant, died when uncleared ordnance exploded. Ironically, it turned out to be a NATO cluster bomb. These two Gurkha soldiers were only the latest of several thousand Nepalese troops and British officers to die for "King and Country" since the establishment of the Gurkha Regiments in 1815.



*The Army only issues a ceremonial kukri to its Gurkha soldiers, which is worn with the various parade dress uniforms like the No. 1 and No. 2 dress, and the No. 3 dress, which is worn in this photograph by a member of the Pipes and Drums of 1 RGR. No. 3 dress is basically the equivalent of No. 1 dress, but it is designed for tropical regions. For service in the field, the Gurkha soldiers buy their own kukri, which is often made by local blacksmiths of the region they come from. They may even arm themselves with a kukri that is a family heirloom. (Carl Schulze)*





*"Close-quarter attack". Moments after a hand grenade detonates in an enemy trench, dust and smoke are still visible in the air. The trench is cleared by small arms fire from the Gurkha soldier's SA-80 assault rifle. Any last resistance can be stopped either by the bayonet or the kukri. (Carl Schulze)*

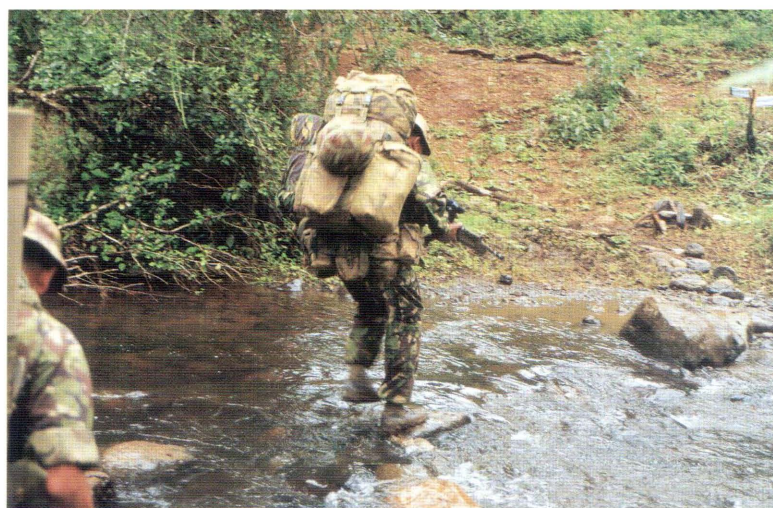
### Two Centuries of Service

When at the end of the 18th century the kingdom of Nepal expanded, its forces soon reached territory that was strongly influenced by the Honorable East India Company. In 1792, a treaty of Commerce and Friendship was proposed between Britain and Nepal after the Nepalese Army abandoned its plans to invade Kashmir. With both sides still willing to expand, war was inevitable. It broke out in 1814 after disputes erupted over possessions and repeated raids by the Nepalese into Bengal and Bihar. After two bloody campaigns were fought between the 21,000 British and 16,000 Nepalese troops, the war ended in 1815 with the Treaty of Segauli.

During the war the British, who discovered that the fighting was much harder than expected, developed a deep feeling of respect and admiration for the Gurkhas. They were impressed by their fighting spirit and their strong belief in a code of honor, even when a situation was hopeless. It is not surprising, then, that when the war ended the British permitted the Gurkhas to volunteer for service in the East India Company, which was also known as "John Company", which led to the nickname "Johnny Gurkha". The first Gurkha units — the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Gurkha Rifles — were formed on 24 April 1815, having been raised from captured Nepalese troops. The Treaty of Segauli, which was ratified in March 1816, gave the East India Company the right to raise battalions of Gurkhas for service. Since that time the rulers of Nepal have allowed their subjects to serve under the British Crown.



*Prior to a platoon-level live-firing attack, a platoon commander of A Company, 1 RGR briefs his section commanders on the battle plan. In addition to "situation enemy forces", the briefing provides all the necessary information to enable the section commanders to carry out their commander's plan. (Carl Schulze)*



*Weighted down by heavy loads, Gurkhas cross one of the countless streams during jungle warfare training in Africa. Inside their PLCE Bergens they carry everything needed for several days of operation in the jungle, everything from sleeping bags to waterproof clothing and from rations to ammunition. (Carl Schulze)*

The name Gurkha is taken from the principality of Gorkha, which in the mid-18th century conquered and ruled most of what is now known as Nepal. The name is still applied to the soldiers, even though most of them come from all over Nepal and not from the principality itself. The spelling of the name Gurkha has also changed and has included versions such as Goorkha and Gorkha. The Gurkha regiments first fought for the British government in the Pindarhi and Sikh wars, but their real baptism of fire came with the Indian mutiny in 1857 where they proved their loyalty by putting down the mutiny alongside British regiments. Between 1857 and the beginning of the First World War, Gurkhas saw action in Burma, Malaya, Tibet, China, Afghanistan, Somaliland, the North-East and the North-West Frontiers of India, and Cyprus. During this period the number of Gurkhas in British (and also Indian) service continued to grow. Between 1901 and 1906 the Gurkha Regiments were renumbered as the 1st through 10th Gurkha Rifles.

In the First World War, more than 200,000 Nepali hill men answered the call to arms and fought in France, Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, Gallipoli, Palestina and Salonika. Two Victoria Crosses were won during this time, the first ever awarded to Gurkha soldiers (prior to 1912 the VC could only be awarded to the British officers of the Gurkha units). Also an 11th Regiment was raised and additional battalions were added to the original units, two per regiment. Between the wars, Gurkha units saw action in the Third Afghan War and in campaigns on the North-West Frontier of India. In the Second World War, some 112,000 Gurkhas in



*In past years the Gurkhas were led only by British officers. This is no longer the case, and today Gurkhas can also become officers. Here a British lieutenant is giving orders during the regrouping of his platoon after they have just taken an enemy objective. (Carl Schulze)*





*Probably the last thing an enemy will see when he engages in a close-quarter battle is the bad end of a Light Support Weapon operated by a skilled Gurkha. Using mostly the same parts as the SA-80 assault weapon, the LSW has a longer, heavier barrel and a bipod. The weapon also has a caliber of 5.56mm and uses the same 30-round magazine as the SA-80. (Carl Schulze)*

forty battalions (and additional training, parachute, garrison and porter units) fought side by side with British and Commonwealth units in Syria, Italy, the Western Desert, Greece, from Malaya to Singapore and from the Siamese border to Rangoon. The price paid for service with the British Army was 23,000 casualties and 7,544 losses of life among the Gurkha units. A total of ten Victoria Crosses were awarded to the Gurkhas during this period.



*In the twilight caused by the jungle canopy, the enemy can hide everywhere, which makes both moving and reconnaissance very complicated. With each step the surrounding territory has to be checked very carefully. Pure concentration is reflected in this Gurkha's face as his attention is drawn to something suspicious, perhaps a noise indicating the presence of the enemy. (Carl Schulze)*

When India became independent in 1947, the British Army decided to keep Gurkha units in its lines. Following negotiations between India, Britain and Nepal, four regiments (2 GR, 6 GR, 7 GR and 10 GR) were chosen, while the rest stayed with the Indian Army, where, as is the case with the British Army, Gurkha units are still found today. In 1948, when the British Gurkha units were moved to the Far East, they were combined with some British units into the 17th Gurkha Infantry Division with the 48, 63 and 99 Gurkha Infantry Brigades. In addition, the Gurkha Signal Regiment, the Gurkha Military Police, the Gurkha Transport Regiment, and the Gurkha Engineer Regiment, as well as the Gurkha Independent Parachute Company and the 5 Gurkha Dog Company, were raised. The two battalions of the 7th Gurkha Rifles were regrouped into 101 and 102 Field Regiments, Royal Artillery (7th Gurkha Rifles), but as the Malayan Emergency demanded more infantry, they reentered into their old role after one year.

With the Malayan Emergency, a twelve-year campaign against communist terrorists began, which ceased after Malaya became independent in 1957. Up to 1960 an average of five Gurkha battalions — and most of the time an even larger number of Gurkha units — was constantly in action in the Malayan jungle. An operation in Brunei during the revolt of 1962, in which the Gurkhas developed their tight links with the Sultanat, followed. Between 1962 and 1966, all Gurkha units saw action in Borneo and Sarawak against units of the Indonesian Army. It was during this campaign that the last Victoria Cross given to a member of the Brigade of Gurkhas was won by Lance Corporal Rambahadur Limbu of 2nd Battalion, 19th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles. This brought the total up to 26, 13 of which were awarded to officers and the other 13 to soldiers. Between 1967 and 1972, the 17th Gurkha Infantry Division was reduced to brigade size from some 14,000 soldiers to 8,000, and the home of the Brigade was moved from Malaysia to Hong Kong, with one battalion stationed permanently in Brunei and the United





Here a platoon commander of A Company, 1 RGR moves through thick bamboo. He carries the radio with the platoon net himself, while his radio operator carries the radio with the company net. This allows him to stay in contact with his section commanders and to give orders on very short notice. (Carl Schulze)

Kingdom. Now called Gurkha Field Force in Hong Kong, the Gurkhas stayed busy patrolling the border of China, stopping illegal immigration and providing security. In 1974, the 1st Battalion, 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles were deployed to Cyprus to reinforce British sovereign bases during the Turkish invasion. As part of 5 Infantry Brigade, which later became 5 Airborne Brigade, the 1st Battalion, the



The 94mm LAW is the hand-held antitank weapon currently used by the British Army. The weapon is put to use here by soldiers of 1 RGR. The LAW has an effective range of 500m (1,640 ft) and a carrying weight of 10 kg (22 lb). Before a soldier can fire the 94mm warhead of the weapon, he can employ the built-in semi-automatic spotting rifle to reduce aiming errors. (Carl Schulze)



Traps can be used to catch animals as well as human beings. Here Gurkhas are briefed by a JWI on a simple trap, just a plank of wood with nails in it, which swings up when somebody steps on the end. (Carl Schulze)

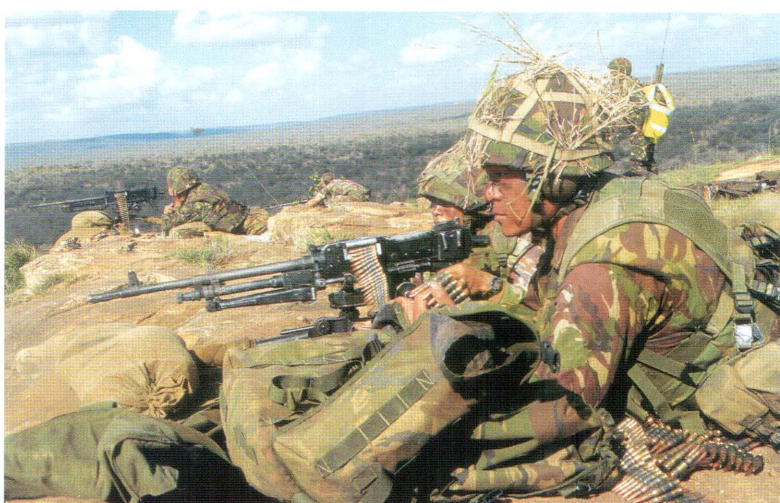
7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles, then based in Church Crookham, deployed to the Falklands on 12 May 1982 to help recapture the islands from Argentina, which had launched an invasion on 2 April.

From November 1983, when 5 Airborne Brigade came into being, to September 1999, when it started to rerole and formed the nucleus of 12 Mechanized Brigade, the Gurkha battalion, which was then based in Britain, was one of two Air Landing Battalions of the Brigade, tasked to take enemy airfields by conducting Tactical Air Landing Operations (TALO). Today the 1 RGR is part of the new 12 Mechanized Brigade, but it is still a light-role battalion, having no armor at all. During the Gulf War in 1991, Gurkhas deployed among British regiments to support units with additional manpower.

The latest on the Gurkhas' list of operations is the deployment of companies to Bosnia for six-month tours as a base security force from 1996 onward. This not only means providing security for British bases, such as the Banja Luka Ops Company, for example, it also means controlling a 25-sq km (15.5-sq mi) area that includes the Bosnian Serb capital, as well as reinforcing other SFOR troops of MND SW, such as the Czech mechanized battalion.

### The Gurkhas and their Origins

The Kingdom of Nepal, the home country of the Gurkha soldiers, is situated to the north of India and measures 140,797 square kilometers (87,500 sq mi) stretching from the highest peaks of the Himalayas,



Used here in the sustained fire role, a 7.62mm GPMG provides cover fire for a platoon attack launched by A Company, 1 RGR. When the weapon is used on the tripod, the effective range of the GPMG is increased from 800m (2,625 ft) in the light role to 1,800m (5,905 ft) in the sustained fire role. (Carl Schulze)





Usually battle runs are filled with realistic situations such as simulated battlefield casualties or the simulated loss of a section or platoon commander. Here Gurkhas treat one of their comrades for a simulated head wound. (Carl Schulze)

including Mount Everest, to the plains of India. Its climate, therefore, ranges from the permanent snow of the high altitude regions to the subtropical rain forests in the south. The 19.3 million Nepali citizens usually belong to a clan, with the Magar and Gurung coming mainly from the west of Nepal and the Sunwar, Rai and Limbu originating in the east.

In former times the recruiting officers would select recruits when visiting the tribal areas. Today these visits only serve to spread the word about where to appear for selection and to insure that the ones interested pass the so-called "hill selection": they have to be between 17 and 22 years of age, stand at least 5 ft 2 in tall, weigh at least 7 st 12 lb, be of good health, and have a certain level of education. When the potential candidates appear at the meeting points, there are usually 30 applicants for every space available. From here they are brought to Pokhara, where the selection center is located. The first test to be passed is in English grammar and math. The candidates who earn the highest scores are then earmarked for service with The Queen's Gurkha Signals or The Queen's Gurkha Engineers. Next the candidates are tested for medical fitness — a test which a surprising number fail due to heart problems and high blood pressure — and physical fitness. This test combines the standard Basic Fitness Test of the British Army with a special Gurkha challenge, the doko race, i.e., carrying a basket with 75 lb of stones up a 4.2-km (2.6-mi) long steep course. Here again many candidates' hopes are destroyed. The ones who pass are then tested for initiative and go through final interviews with the recruiting officers.

By the end of three weeks of intensive testing, the recruiting officers know every soldier well enough to decide whether he possesses the desired mental and physical qualities. Although this last stage of selection relies on impressions instead of measurable results, the fact that the failure rate of Gurkha recruits during basic training is far lower than that of British recruits proves that the recruiting officers are correct in their assessments. According to *Soldier Magazine*, between 1990 and 1995 only three recruits failed to pass the basic training, whereas an average of 30% of British recruits fail in the first stage of being a soldier.

The recruits who pass the selection are transferred to Britain, where basic training is conducted at the Infantry Training Battalion in Catterick. Basic training lasts for nine months and contains three months of language training. In addition to learning all necessary military skills, the recruits also receive lessons on the British way of life and Western culture, which in many ways may be quite different from what they are used to. At the end of their basic training, the recruit swears allegiance to Her Majesty the Queen and is posted to his unit.

All British officers serving with the Gurkhas have volunteered to do so. They have their first contact with their future regiments after they have passed Sandhurst. After receiving their commission, they attend the platoon commanders' course in Warminster, after which they are posted



"Ready for action!" Well camouflaged, wearing the Mk 6 ballistic helmet and combat body armor, this GPMG gunner waits for the order to move. In this scenario, with the GPMG being used in the light role with a 50-round belt of live ammunition, the weapon weighs 13.85 kg (30.5 lb). (Carl Schulze)

to their respective unit. Within the first six months they have to take a three-month language course in Nepal, which combines eight weeks of lessons and a three-week trek to the hills to familiarize the new officer with both the native language and the Nepali way of life.

### The Gurkha Welfare Trust

A British Gurkha soldier can claim a pension after 15 years of service, but this means that some are left out in the cold. In particular a



The other machine gun used by the machine gun platoon of Support Company is the .50-caliber HBM 2 Browning of WWII fame. The well-known weapon was re-introduced by the British Army several years ago to give additional firepower to the battalion's fire support arsenal. (Carl Schulze)





*Gurkhas patrol through the scrub bushland of Dol Dol training area in Kenya. During their time in Dol Dol the Gurkhas fine-tuned their company's standing operational procedures in traveling, traveling overwatch, bounding overwatch, harboring and ambush drills. (Carl Schulze)*

great number of WWII veterans had no chance to serve long enough to qualify for the pension, and the reduction of numbers during the 1960s served to further aggravate the situation. To correct the impression that Britain leaves her soldiers stranded when they need her the most, the Gurkha Welfare Trust was founded in 1969. Every Gurkha who has ever served in the British Army can qualify for a pension paid by the Trust in case he should become unable to take care of himself or for a hardship grant in case he is struck down by one of the many natural afflictions. The widows and dependents of former Gurkha servicemen are also eligible. The 8 GBP paid per month may sound a like a pitiful reward for the achievements of the Gurkhas, but in a state where the gross national product is 120 pounds per person per year, these few pounds are enough to provide the basic necessities of life. But the Gurkha Welfare Trust not only hands out money, it also works to improve the conditions of life in the hills, the traditional recruiting areas, by operating medical centers, building schools and financing education for the children of former servicemen, and by working on the infrastructure and the water supply.

### **Organization of a Gurkha Infantry Battalion**

The structure of the Gurkha infantry battalion is similar to that of their British counterpart. With a peacetime strength of 707, which is raised to 740 in wartime, it has slightly more personnel than the British infantry battalion in the light role with its approximately 625 personnel. The battalion is made up of three rifle companies, the HQ and Support Company, and the Fire Support Company. The three rifle companies, designated as A, B, and C, each consist of three platoons and the company HQ. While A and B Companies have five Milan firing posts in one of their platoons, C Company has all the battalion's assault pioneers in its third platoon. The rifle platoons of the company consist of three sections of eight men each and the platoon HQ, which contains the platoon commander, the platoon sergeant, a radio operator, the 51mm mortar carried by a rifleman, and two infantrymen. Six of the eight



*When the GPMG is used in the SF role, the C2 optical sight unit is used. Here a Gurkha sets the weapon to an arc of fire. It is possible to mount the weapon in a way that keeps it from firing out of this arc, keeping both bearing and elevation within the given limits. This allows the machine gunner to engage an enemy even when he doesn't see him but can hear him, e.g., as he moves into a noise trap. (Carl Schulze)*



*While his platoon moves into a harbor position, this GPMG gunner provides cover for his comrades. Moving into a harbor position is carried out using Standing Operational Procedure: A platoon on the move first prepares for a snap ambush to prevent somebody from following the platoon. When the platoon commander is sure he is not being followed by the enemy, the platoon then moves into the harbor location, which is usually formed in a triangular shape, with each of the three sections forming one side and the platoon HQ located in the middle. (Carl Schulze)*





Fire Team Charlie carefully crosses a clearing in the Gaithuru jungle while Fire Team Delta follows at a distance of 10 to 15 meters (32 to 50 feet). While operating in the open, the distance between the teams is expanded, whereas in thick undergrowth it is usually only 3 to 5 meters (1 to 5.5 yards). The first two men are the scouts. They are followed by the section commander and the LSW gunner. (Carl Schulze)



P Company is the first step a Gurkha soldier has to master if he volunteers to be a paratrooper. Here Gurkhas TAB during a 29-km (18-mile) forced march, which has to be covered in 4 hours and 30 minutes while carrying assault rifles and 20 kg (44lb) of equipment in a rucksack. Other marches in the so-called "test week" are a 19-km (12-mile) combat march with the same load but with a time limit of 2 hours and 35 minutes and a 16-km (10-mile) march in 1 hour and 50 minutes. (Carl Schulze)

infantrymen of the sections are armed with the SA-80 assault rifle, while the other two use the Light Support Weapon. Both weapons use 5.56mm ammunition. In one section per platoon, one LSW is replaced by a 7.62 caliber GPMG in the light role.

While the HQ and Support Company provides all logistics and command for the battalion and assists the battalion commander (a Lieutenant Colonel) in leading his battalion, it also contains the battalion's 24-man reconnaissance platoon with its six Land Rover gunships. The Fire Support Company contains a mortar platoon with nine 81mm mortars, a machine gun platoon with six .50 caliber and nine GPMG SF machine guns, as well as an antitank platoon with fourteen Milan antitank weapon systems.

### **Gurkhas-The Future of the British Army?**

Even though the number of Gurkha soldiers was reduced dramatically in the 1990s and the 48 Brigade of Gurkhas was disbanded as a tactical formation in 1994, it is obvious, given the current recruiting problem among British infantry regiments, that the Gurkhas are needed. In an interview with Major Griffith, the 2 IC of 1 RGR, he stated the following: "Our soldiers are the cream of the Nepali boys who want to become soldiers, and there could be many more recruited. This may be an answer to the recruiting problem of the British Army at home". For the Gurkhas, this could also mean that in the future they may see themselves in an armored infantry role, one from which the British Army has left them out for some reason. It is certain that in the 21st Century Nepalese boys will enlist to answer the call for "King and Country", whether their reason for enlistment is the search for adventure, a chance to see the world, education, money, or perhaps to follow in the tradition of their families, who in some cases have had men serving in the British Army since 1815.



Tactical Advance to Battle (TAB) is the name given to speed marching. "TABing" is part of the routine training carried out by Gurkha units. Here Gurkhas of 1 RGR are seen TABing 8 miles during their dry training phase in Kenya. While TABing, the Gurkhas carry a certain load of equipment that is designed to make the soldiers fit to march a certain distance and still be able to fight when the forced march is completed. (Carl Schulze)





In addition to the kukri knife, every Gurkha infantryman is equipped with a bayonet for his SA-80 assault rifle. Anytime the infantryman expects to engage in close-quarter combat, he fixes his bayonet. If the soldier runs out of ammunition while confronting an enemy soldier, he can finish his mission with one quick thrust. (Carl Schulze)



Prior to a platoon attack, Gurkhas load the magazines of their SA-80 and LSW. Each soldier carries at least four magazines in his webbing and a fifth in his rifle, resulting in a total of at least 150 rounds per soldier. Additional ammunition is carried in the rucksack or daypack as a reserve, which means that magazines are constantly refilled during battle whenever time allows for it. (Carl Schulze)



Gurkhas of 1 RGR await the order to move out while they take part in a walk through/talk through exercise. This type of training allows every soldier to get a close look at the movements and actions he is supposed to perform later on. A walk-through/talk-through shows him in slow motion what his commanders expect of him. (Carl Schulze)



Close-quarter combat. Here a Gurkha engages would-be enemy forces at a very short distance. (Carl Schulze)





The training of a light infantry-role battalion of the British Army, a role to which all Gurkha infantry battalions belong, includes numerous helicopter drills. Here Gurkhas are picked up by Lynx Mk 9 LBH. (Carl Schulze)



Gurkha snipers are experts in camouflage. For this photograph the sniper's position was decamouflaged after the author nearly stepped on the motionless soldier. The soldier is equipped with the L96 A1 7.62mm sniper rifle, which was designed by the Olympic champion Malcolm Cooper and built by Accuracy. (Carl Schulze)



The current standard rifle of the British Army, including the Gurkhas, is the SA-80, which replaced the FN SLR in the mid-1980s. The weapon fires 5.56 mm x 45 mm ammunition and has a weight of 4.98 kg (11 lb), with a magazine loaded with 30 rounds. For infantry units, the SUSAT optical sight is mounted on the weapon, which allows the user to fire up to an effective range of 500m (547 yd). (Carl Schulze)



All Gurkha platoons have a 51mm light mortar in their HQ section. Capable of firing at a range of up to 750m (819 yards), the weapon can fire a variety of illumination, smoke and high explosive rounds in support of the platoon's infantry sections. It is also possible to use the weapon at a short range with high accuracy in close-quarter battles. The weapon weighs 6.275 kg (14 lb). (Carl Schulze)





Fire and movement are the key elements of a successful attack. In this photograph a section commander moves forward while his Fire Team Delta provides cover. (Carl Schulze)



Within a section two soldiers are armed with the LSW. The other six are equipped with the SA-80. Here the first man carries a light support weapon. (Carl Schulze)



Water is one of the key survival items, and there are many ways to collect it. One of them is demonstrated in this photo by a jungle warfare instructor. (Carl Schulze)



Gurkha curry is served with rice, corn soup and vegetables, such as spicy potatoes. The Gurkhas have freshly cooked curry twice a day, seven days a week. As a concession to their officers, who are mostly of British origin, British food is served two days a week, but most of the officers are used to the distinctive taste of the curry. (Carl Schulze)





*The Gurkhas' weapons arsenal combines the latest British assault rifle, the SA-80, with the ancient kukri knife, the origin of which can be traced back to the armies of Alexander the Great. The current badge of the Royal Gurkha Rifles, which is well displayed in this photograph, consists of the Queen's crown and a pair of crossed kukris. (Carl Schulze)*



*Live-firing training is also taught under NBC conditions. Here Gurkha wears an S-10 respirator case. Depending on which type of chemical agent is used, the NBC suit and rubber gloves may also be worn. (Carl Schulze)*



*This photograph was taken at midday, which explains the twilight beneath the jungle canopy. The soldier, one of 1 RGR's JWs, just happens to be moving through some open jungle, but most of the time the undergrowth is much thicker. (Carl Schulze)*

*In 1998 the Gurkha Reinforcement Company, B Company, 1 RGR was deployed for six months to Banja Luka as Banja Luka Ops Coy. Here members of the company guard the main gate of Banja Luka Meta Factory, the main base of the MND SW HQ. For their deployment to Bosnia the company returned their newly received Land Rover XDs and received older 110s. A composite version is seen here. (Carl Schulze)*



